Labeling

Labeling issues

Labeling is a set of information provided to the consumer to orient his choice (voluntary labeling) or warn him about potential risks (mandatory labeling).

Labeling regulations for GM foods around the world are highly fragmented in country specific initiatives. Many oppose labeling because to make such label truthful and not misleading all commodities would need to be segregated and tested, and the label would not have room to impart information that could not be distinguished in other ways. In 1986 the OECD recommended that risks associated with organisms derived through modern biotechnology be regarded as the same as those from conventional and assessed in a similar way.

This concept of substantial equivalence has been mirrored in the United States and Canadian regulatory regimes and no special label would be needed unless the novel food are substantially different from their conventional counterparts. However, extensive public debate surrounding the GM foods has led some consumers to call for labeling of such products.

A safety concern:

Regulatory agencies from US, Europe, and international bodies have all recognized that the GE varieties currently on the market are as safe if not safer than their conventional counterpart. The main reasons are the extensive safety data requested prior to releasing these crops. After almost 10 years of release of GE crops (about 4 years for the GE Newleaf potato 1998 ? 2001), no unintentional or long term effects have been identified. The potato crop maintained under inappropriate temperature and light conditions may accumulate glycoalkaloids, which are highly toxic to human health. Processing of potato under inappropriate temperature and frying conditions may accumulate acrylamide a toxic compound to human health. None of these two risks derived from misuse of the potato crop belong to any mandatory labeling.

A development concern:

The impact of labeling GE products is highly significant for developing countries and small holder farmers. Because of labeling requirements and transboundary identification system, it likely that there will be liabilities when GE crops are being grown or sold in a place without noticing its GE identity. Although an international liability system is not yet set, it is a major concern for developing countries and smallholder farmers who do not have the regulatory capability to prevent mixtures and illegal movement of seeds. The requirement and costs of labeling may well exclude smallholder farmers and delay access by developing countries to such technologies.