

The Potential Impacts of Mandatory Labeling for Genetically Engineered Food in the United States

There is **no scientific evidence** that genetically engineered (GE) foods have any harmful or long-term effects over multiple generations.

- The U.S. National Academy of Sciences concluded that GE poses no new or different risks to food safety.
- The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has stated that it has no basis for finding that GE foods, “as a class, . . . present any different or greater safety concern than foods developed by traditional plant breeding.”
- The World Trade Organization frowns on process-based labels mandating disclosure of information on production-process issues that do not relate to food safety.
- There is no science-based reason to single out GE foods for mandatory process-based labeling.
- Mandatory labeling could have negative implications for First Amendment rights and trade issues [and] will increase food costs.

No comprehensive **GE labeling law** has yet passed in any state.

- There are major legal issues associated with state laws mandating process-based GE labeling.
- The First Amendment prohibits government compulsion of commercial speech unless the speech is factual, uncontroversial, and reasonably related to a legitimate government interest.
- An alternative to state-by-state laws would be the implementation of a national GE labeling law.



Adequate information that allows **consumers to make choices** consistent with their preferences is an essential feature of well-functioning food markets.

- Market-driven voluntary labeling measures are currently providing consumers with non-GE choices.
- Over time, food prices would rise to cover the incremental costs of any mandatory GE labeling regime in the U.S. market, and these increased costs would exact a greater burden on low-income families.

Summary and conclusion:

- Mandatory labeling abandons the U.S. practice of providing for food preferences through voluntary product differentiation and labeling.
- Current labeling authority is federal; state mandatory labeling laws may be invalidated for conflicting with federal authority.
- Labeling at the national level has trade implications.
- Mandatory GE labeling would increase U.S. food costs.
- Objective information on the scientific issues and possible legal ramifications needs to be provided to legislators and consumers.

Experts to Contact for More Information:

Alison Van Eenennaam (alvaneennaam@ucdavis.edu); Bruce M. Chassy (bchassy@illinois.edu); Nicholas Kalaitzandonakes (kalaitzandonakesn@missouri.edu); Thomas P. Redick (tpr@geeclaw.com)

To view the complete text of this CAST Issue Paper, click [here](#) or visit the CAST website (www.cast-science.org) and click on Publications. For more information about CAST, visit the website or contact Linda Chimenti, Executive Vice President, at 515-292-2125 ext 231.