

# Momentum Building for Mandatory GMO Labeling?

BY ALLIE MENTZER

**T**he GMO labeling movement achieved some significant gains this past March, and advocates are hopeful that momentum will continue to build towards a national system of mandatory labeling. While the outcome remains unclear, Congress likely will continue to work towards a national labeling law before Vermont's mandatory GMO labeling law goes into effect on July 1 of this year.

Meanwhile, lawmakers and major food manufacturers are beginning to show that they have heard the voices of the majority of Americans who want GMO foods to be labeled. As the debate heats up, now is a great time to recap some of the GMO labeling movement's efforts and accomplishments.

## A sustained effort

At this time last year, there was a strong possibility that Congress would pass a law that would block mandatory GMO labeling at both the state and national levels. Advocates of GMO labeling have dubbed various iterations of this bill the Denying Americans the Right to Know, or "DARK," Act. National Co+op Grocers (NCG) opposes the bill and has worked with partner organizations including the Just Label It campaign, Center for Food Safety, and Environmental Working Group to defeat it.

Just days after the DARK Act was introduced to the U.S. House of Representatives, NCG co-ops had access to a toolkit of Co+op, "stronger together" branded materials that facilitated raising a call to action in co-ops' communities—using messaging aligned with our partner organizations' national strategy. The toolkit included nearly 30 media materials, such as posters, social media copy, and web graphics, each directing co-op shoppers to the Co+op website ([strongertogether.coop](http://strongertogether.coop)) for the latest information about GMO labeling legislation, including how to contact Congress.

In addition to our consumer-facing call to action, NCG also directly urged Congress to reject the DARK Act. Efforts included participation in weekly strategy calls with our Washington, D.C.-based partner organizations, financial support for media campaigns to inform lawmakers and the public about this issue, and multiple trips to Capitol Hill to engage with lawmakers and their staff.

Although the House passed a version of the DARK Act last year, the bill has repeatedly stalled in the Senate largely due to public outcry in

opposition to the bill. In 2015, the Senate rejected both a standalone version of the DARK Act and a budget "rider" version. This past March, senators cast a critical vote to determine whether or not the bill should move forward to a final vote. In a stunning victory for the GMO labeling movement, the DARK Act received only 48 of the 60 votes required to advance it. This vote appeared to be a watershed moment, signifying to many manufacturers that the political will to block mandatory labeling is waning. In the wake of the Senate vote, several major food companies (e.g., Campbells, General Mills, Mars, Kellogg, and ConAgra) announced plans to label foods produced with genetic engineering.

The fact that Congress has, as of press time, rejected the DARK Act speaks volumes about the GMO labeling movement's growing voice and impact. Many thanks to our partner organizations that have shown leadership on this issue and to the NCG co-ops that have worked hard over the past year to help defeat it.

## Compromise ahead?

NCG and our partners have steadily moved the needle towards a national, mandatory GMO labeling law, despite an unfavorable political climate on Capitol Hill. There continues to be enormous lobbying pressure to pass a bill that preempts state labeling laws without giving consumers clear, on-package information identifying foods that have been produced using genetic engineering. Despite these challenges, the GMO labeling movement has successfully brought those opposed to mandatory labeling to the negotiating table, where NCG and its partners will continue to advocate for manda-

tory labeling as part of any forthcoming compromise legislation.

As the Senate leadership works towards compromise legislation, it's important to recognize just how far the GMO labeling movement has advanced this conversation by informing both the public and lawmakers, and providing the public with the tools to effectively influence Congress.

*NCG prioritizes advocacy efforts in support of mandatory GMO labeling as a consumer right-to-know issue, so that people can have the information they need to make their own purchasing decisions. For the latest on this issue and to learn what you can do to support mandatory GMO labeling efforts, visit [www.strongertogether.coop/GMObill](http://www.strongertogether.coop/GMObill) and follow the Just Label It campaign on social media. □*



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