

Alaska Trollers Association

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Representative Benjamin Nageak, Chairman
House Resources
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, AK 99811

RE: HB 92 Labeling of Genetically Engineered Foods

Dear Representative Nageak and Committee Members:

The Alaska Trollers Association (ATA) supports HB 92, which would require the clear labeling of genetically engineered (GE) food products. We believe that HB 92 reflects the wishes and a concern of the vast majority of Alaskan's who wish to make informed choices about the foods they eat.

ATA represents the interests of commercial hook and line salmon fishermen who operate in state and federal waters; our members are committed to delivering wholesome, high quality seafood to market.

Numerous public opinion surveys have been conducted in the U.S. and reveal that up to 95% of respondents favor the labeling of GE seafood; about half consistently say they would not choose to eat GE seafood if given a choice. But how can we tell which is which if it's not labeled?

Genetically engineered foods have been around for about 20 years; by 2012, FDA estimated that 93% of the soybeans and 88% of the corn planted in the US was modified. Very few of those products are labeled. In 1992, FDA established a policy that would allow approved GE foods, like soy and corn, to be sold without labeling, because those foods are not viewed as "materially" different from non-GE varieties. FDA considers "material" differences as those that can be recognized by the human senses, like taste and smell. So, the use of genetic engineering meets FDA's limited threshold for "materiality" the same, because the genetic and molecular changes can't be seen. Since 2009, FDA has endorsed this same labeling policy for GE animals. In the GE pipeline for approval are several species of plants and fish, mosquitos, pigs, goats, cattle, and more.

The Alaska Legislature has responded to the call for consumer information through labeling since 2005, with the passage of several bills specific to the labeling of farmed and/or GE salmon. One of the first bill's (SB 25¹) sponsors, Representative Gary Stevens (R-Kodiak), noted, "*[t]his bill helps highlight Alaska seafood as distinct from genetically modified seafood, doing away with any vagueness that may exist to the consumer when purchasing seafood...*" His co-sponsor Senator Kim Elton (D-Juneau) was, "*... encouraged by the bipartisan support this bill received. It is a sign that, when it comes to seafood,*

¹ http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get_bill_text.asp?hsid=SB0025Z&session=24

Alaskans stand up for informed consumers and friends and neighbors working in the wild fish industry." Fortunately, questions with regard to transparency about our food supply consistently transcend party affiliation here in Alaska.

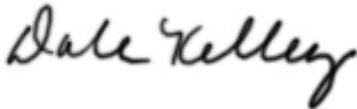
Fishermen are particularly alarmed by the cavalier approach the nation has taken on the issue of genetically engineered foodstuffs. Once you allow a food to be modified, it becomes different and the level of risk changes, period. FDA's own scientists made that point during the 1990s debate on the agency's policy on GE plants. And while the scientific community is not yet done analyzing the risks of genetically engineered foods, it is well known that there are professional disagreements regarding its safety. At minimum, questions regarding toxicity and allergens do not appear to have been thoroughly vetted and resolved.

While the GE foods may ultimately prove safe and wholesome, there is no doubt that they are unlike the foods that most of us grew up on. It is a processed food at its most basic level, and should be labeled accordingly, particularly when no independent science exists to prove that it is safe. Such a label is not misleading, nor is it in any way false, it is simply telling the consumer the truth about a type of food that until just a couple decades ago was inconceivable.

Labeling of GE foods boils down to one of the most fundamental of human needs and rights –access to wholesome foods and information about how they are produced. The buying public must be allowed to make an informed choice and labeling will afford them that option. It is our hope that Alaska and the other 48 states will help make labeling available for consumers, particularly if the federal agencies continue to decline to do so.

Thank you for considering ATA's point of view on this matter.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dale Kelley". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Dale Kelley
Executive Director