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U.S.

U.S. Senate Approves Legislation Requiring GMO Labels

GMO label bill to be considered by House



A sign hangs at a rally on July 1 in Montpelier, Vt., protesting a proposal by Congress that would allow companies to use computer labels to indicate whether a product has been made with the help of genetic engineering. The U.S. Senate has approved legislation that would require the labeling of foods made with genetically modified organisms, clearing a major hurdle that could pave the way for the first national standard governing how consumers are informed about the controversial ingredients. *PHOTO: ASSOCIATED PRESS*

By **HEATHER HADDON**

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The U.S. Senate has approved legislation that would require the labeling of foods made with genetically modified organisms, clearing a major hurdle that could pave the way for the first national standard governing how consumers are informed about the controversial ingredients.

The bill cleared the Senate 63-30 late Thursday night, and action now turns to the House of Representatives.

Rep. Mike Conaway (R., Texas), chairman of the House Committee on Agriculture, said on Friday afternoon that while he didn't support mandating the disclosures of the ingredients, he expected the Senate's bill to be considered on the House floor next week, and he would support it. Lawmakers have a week to consider the bill before they go on a seven-week recess through Labor Day.

If the federal bill passes, it would give companies the choice of labeling the existence of GMOs through different ways, including the use of a digital QR code that would provide consumers with information about a product online through the use of a smartphone. And it would pre-empt any state law such as the one in Vermont which went into effect this year.

Farm associations and food and beverage companies have praised the legislation.

"This bill is not perfect, but it would avoid the chaos of 50 different state laws and a

confusing array of labels for ingredients scientifically proven safe,” American Farm Bureau Federation President Zippy Duvall said in a statement.

Environmental groups and other critics argued the bill doesn’t go far enough and say few people will actually access the online information.

Legislation passed in Vermont in 2014 created the first mandatory GMO labeling law of its kind, requiring food makers to label products that contained any genetically engineered ingredients, including corn, soy and sugar beets. Rhode Island is eyeing adoption of GMO legislation, as have other states.

Some congressional members fear that individual state laws will hamstrung national food companies with a patchwork of requirements.

But federal standards are far from certain. The mandatory guidelines in the Senate’s bill differ markedly from the House’s version that called for the voluntary labeling of food with GMOs.

House members will either have to accept the Senate’s version of the bill or pass their own, forcing negotiations to reach a compromise between the chambers. Any substantial change to the Senate’s bill by the House would likely postpone federal action on the matter until the fall.

—Kristina Peterson contributed to this article.

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