

# Food First NEWS & VIEWS

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## GM labeling comes to California: The right to know versus the right to impose

*By Oliver James*

**T**his November, Californians vote on Proposition 37, “The Right to Know Genetically Engineered Food Act,” on whether to label food made with genetically modified ingredients. For the first time,

GMO labeling will be posed directly to the electorate. And since California’s food policy affects what’s on people’s plates almost everywhere, massive market shares (and profits) are on the line.

[Monsanto’s third-quarter earnings](#) are up 35% this year, driven by its GE corn and soybean portfolios.<sup>1</sup> 85% percent of the corn and 90% of soybeans grown in the U.S. are GE, and the vast majority of the GE seed market belongs to Monsanto (the remainder mainly to DuPont). Their profits this year are due to the fact that [more corn acreage was planted in America this year](#) than at any other time since 1937.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, seed prices are up 135% since 2001 and Monsanto projects another 10% seed price hike for 2013.

Farmers would benefit from more competition in the seed industry—particularly, non-GMO seed. But Monsanto’s patented seeds and herbicides are currently the first and last resort.

Corn and soy are the building blocks of many processed foods. By controlling the corn and soy market, Monsanto’s GM ingredients are in [nearly everything we eat](#); up to 75% of what’s on supermarket shelves in the U.S. according to the Grocery Manufacturers of America.<sup>3</sup>

Monsanto’s Roundup-ready corn and soy genes in the U.S. processed food supply—as well as the Round Up glyphosphate weed killer and Bt pesticide—are in meat, cereals, sweeteners, soft drinks and processed foods. Nearly 100% of the non-organic, processed items that contain corn- or soy-based additives found in supermarkets (items often labeled ‘natural’ foods) would require GM labeling. None are currently labeled as such.

While the U.S. Patent Office and the USDA consider Monsanto’s seeds to be distinctive in agriculture, they take the position that eating products made from Monsanto’s GMOs are “not significantly different” from non-GMOs.

Monsanto claims that farmers “prefer” its seeds. So then why doesn’t Monsanto want consumers to know when its GMO ingredients are used in food products?

Could it be that many consumers would not prefer products containing GMOs?

Numerous studies have documented [negative health and environmental effects of GMOs in the food supply](#).<sup>4</sup> US

**INSTITUTE FOR FOOD AND DEVELOPMENT POLICY**

**FOOD FIRST**

398 60th Street, Oakland, CA 94618  
 Phone: (510) 654-4400  
 Fax: (510) 654-4551  
 E-mail: [foodfirst@foodfirst.org](mailto:foodfirst@foodfirst.org)  
 Web site: [www.foodfirst.org](http://www.foodfirst.org)

**CO-FOUNDERS**

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 Martha Katigbak-Fernandez,  
*Operations Officer*

**FELLOWS & CONTRIBUTORS**

Raj Patel, Jun Borrás,  
 Brahm Ahmadi, Rick Jonasse,  
 Leonor Hurtado, Annie Shattuck,  
 Tanya Kerssen, Zoe Brent, Anders Riel  
 Muller, William Wroblewski

**INTERNS AND VOLUNTEERS**

Lauren Anderson, Allison Armstrong,  
 Bilkis Bharucha, Maggie Brickner,  
 Christopher Briones, Annabelle Bushell,  
 Martha Carlson, Olivia Dean, Caroline  
 Dezenendorf, Emery Donovan, Abdinasir  
 Hersi, Brock Hicks, Anisha Hingorani,  
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 Katherine Lupo, Eric Meissner, Elizabeth  
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 Esteban Tinoco, Alexa Zimbalist

The Institute for Food and Development Policy - known as Food First - is a member-supported, nonprofit "peoples' think tank" and education-for-action center. Our work highlights the root causes and value-based solutions to hunger and poverty around the world, with a commitment to fighting racism and establishing food as a fundamental human right.

consumers demand to know which food products contain GMOs, invoking their "right to know" so that they can choose to avoid them. We label foods that contain known allergens. We label food that is Kosher and Halal. We label food that is organic, pasteurized, or raw. This additional labeling is no different.

The biotech giants know that 90% of Americans support labeling what we eat. If consumers reject GMOs in their food, processors will turn to ingredients that are not genetically modified.

No matter how the corporate "front groups" and bloggers try to frame this issue, over one million Californians asked for the right to know if genetically modified ingredients are in their food.

**Footnotes**

- [http://www.agriculture.com/news/business/monsto-thirdquarter-profit-climbs-35-on\\_5-ar24954](http://www.agriculture.com/news/business/monsto-thirdquarter-profit-climbs-35-on_5-ar24954)
- <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/03/30/us-usa-crops-idUSBRE82T0Q420120330>
- <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/7277844/ns/health-genetics/t/americans-cluelessabout-gene-altered-foods/#.UGuuYxgaps4>
- <http://earthopensource.org/index.php/news/60-why-genetically-engineered-food-is-dangerous-new-report-by-genetic-engineers>

**Suggested Reading**

Right to Know Campaign at <http://www.carighttoknow.org/>  
 Vanguard State: California might just lead the way on GMO labeling at <http://grist.org/food/vanguard-state-california-might-just-lead-the-way-on-gmo-labeling/>  
 Connecticut's GE Foods Bill Eviscerated by Lawyers at <http://fairfieldgreenfoodguide.com/2012/05/05/connecticuts-ge-foods-bill/>  
 Friends and Enemies of Your Right to Know at [http://www.organicconsumers.org/articles/article\\_26121.cfm](http://www.organicconsumers.org/articles/article_26121.cfm)

**World Food Day versus Food Day: Why are There Two?**

*By Katherine Lupo*

Established on October 16, 1979 at the 20th General Conference of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), World Food Day (WFD) focuses on "strengthen[ing] international and national solidarity in the struggle against hunger, malnutrition and poverty, and draw[s] attention to achievements in food and agricultural development."

World Food Day events are now held in over 150 countries. In 2011 the theme was "Food Prices—from Crisis to Sustainability." South Africa hosted a World Food Day keynote speaker, Tina Joemat-Pettersson, the South African Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries to talk about the crisis of rising food prices around the world and rising food prices in Mqanduli (the village that hosted the celebration). She then went on to explain the problem; that Mqanduli and the surrounding villages were relying on food imports, while over 4000 hectares of their own arable land were not being cultivated.

On October 24, 2011 the Center for Science in the Public Interest held the first separate US Food Day. Food Day-USA priorities are to promote safer, healthier diets, support sustainable and organic farms, reduce hunger, reform factory farms to protect the environment and animals, and support fair working conditions for US food and farm workers. Food Day-USA events and celebrations are held across the country, supported by US "food celebrities" and many political officials.

There is significant overlap between Food Day-USA's priorities and World Food Day themes.

Clearly World Food Day and Food Day-USA's themes overlap and are complimentary. In 2011 there were more than 300 celebrations of World Food Day. According to Food Day USA organizers the reasons for setting up a parallel food day on October 24<sup>th</sup>

Priorities of Food Day- USA	Applicable World Food Day Themes
Promote Safer, Healthier Diets	Food and Nutrition (1992), The Right to Food (2007)
Supporting Sustainable Organic Farms	Small Farmers (1987), Food for the Future (1990), Biodiversity for Food Security (2004), Agricultural Cooperatives: Key to Feeding the World (2012)
Reduce Hunger	Food Comes First (1981-1982), Food Security (1983), Food for All (1995), Fighting Hunger and Malnutrition (1996), Investing in Food Security (1997), Youth Against Hunger (1999), A Millennium Free From Hunger (2000), Achieving Food Security in Times of Crisis (2009), United Against Hunger (2010)
Reform Factory Farms to Protect the Environment and Animals	Small Farmers (1987), Investing in Agriculture for Food Security (2006)
Support Fair Working Conditions for Food and Farmworkers	Small Farmers (1987), Women in Agriculture (1984), Rural Poverty (1985), Fisherman and Fishing Communities (1986)

were to keep it on the other side of the year from Earth Day, to give schools and campuses more time to organize, and not to go too close to Halloween. Unfortunately, the separation of the two celebrations by only eight days has created confusion and diluted the political impact of both events—at least in the US.

Some activists, in an effort to resolve this, propose to link both into a Sunday to Sunday "Food Week of Action". This week of action includes other important dates—October 12 ~ Dia de la Raza, October 15 ~ International Day of Rural Women, October 16 ~ World Food Day, and October 17 ~ International Day for the Eradication of Poverty.

For over 30 years, people around the world have used World Food Day to connect local and global struggles around food and agriculture. Concerned citizens worldwide have turned World Food Day into a massive global manifestation against

the injustices of the transnational food system—injustices that affect us all. Righting these injustices requires the transformation of the global food system—a system that is centered in the U.S. This kind of transformation comes about through the power of local and global social movements. The movements for food sovereignty and food justice need to forge avenues for the convergence of our activism. Two food days lead to fragmentation. A single Food Day—even with slightly differing agendas—would help bring us all together.

**Resources:**

- [www.Foodday.org](http://www.Foodday.org)
- <http://www.fao.org/getinvolved/worldfoodday/worldfoodday-about/en/>

**Sunsetting on the Community Food Security Coalition?**

In August 2012, US and Canadian Community Food Security Coalition

members were informed that senior staff and the Board of Directors had decided to close CFSC by the end of 2012. Citing the loss of funding, CFSC was farming out existing projects to trusted partner organizations. In a period when corporate politicians have virtually declared war on the public sector and on the grassroots, the loss of a national grassroots coalition that mobilized government funding for community food security is not just unfortunate. It is tragic.

The shock among CFSC members could not have been greater if Monsanto had announced they were going to endorse the labeling of GMOs in our food...

Some members shared messages of sadness and appreciation for the Coalition's 16-year effort to put community food security on the nation's social and economic agenda, while others expressed disbelief and anger. In a strongly-worded rejection of the Board's decision, a letter signed by some former board members, and supported by other members, opposed the move and demanded the resignation of the present Board and Executive Director, with an interim Board to take charge.

Members are still asking "how did this happen?" The silence on the part of CFSC leadership may be due to a non-disparagement clause related to last year's firing of the founding director, that legally restricts what Board and staff can say in public. This made it difficult to maintain institutional transparency during the crisis, and now it's almost impossible for members to evaluate what went wrong. Unsurprisingly, some members have indicated they simply want to drop the issue and move on.

But just as consumers have a right to know what is in their food, members also have a right to know

what happens in their coalition. Above and beyond financial crises, the lack of institutional transparency practically guarantees the demise of any alliance. Whether the objective is reviving the CFSC, substituting or building a new institution, or giving up this coalition work altogether, it seems clear that CFSC members need more institutional information to have an informed and productive discussion.

While restricting institutional information may be a common practice in the corporate world and in many non-member organizations, it creates serious problems within a coalition that elects its board representatives. Whatever the

motives and legalities, the breakdown of transparency shrouds hard work and good intentions—as well as mistakes—in a veil of controversy. This undermines trust which is an essential ingredient common to all successful social movements.

### **But the sun doesn't set on food justice...**

And it would be wrong to interpret the dismemberment of the CFSC as a sign that the food justice movement is falling apart. Despite difficulties in obtaining project funding, indications are that food justice organizations are growing, not disappearing, and despite dwindling financial support, they

are converging, not fragmenting. There is also a notable shift in the forms of community advocacy and the new styles of leadership coming from underserved neighborhoods and from youth.

The closing of CFSC—the main policy instrument for the food justice movement—significantly erodes the policy space for food justice. The challenge for food justice organizations will be how to deepen and broaden the movement's *political space* as it redevelops or replaces its existing policy instruments. If we are going to turn the CFSC's sunset into a new sunrise, the tools and safeguards for transparency will need to be an organic part of these efforts.

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