

To the editor, *Mount Desert Islander*, Bar Harbor, ME (June 6, 2015)

Are you in the dark about The DARK Act? The Deny Americans the Right to Know (what's in their food) Act -- HR 1599?

Also known as "The Mother of All Monsanto Protection Acts," it is now in the House of Representatives, sponsored by Representatives taking Big Money from Monsanto and the food industry.

In a nutshell, this bill prohibits any state from passing a law that requires labeling of GMO foods. (These are the 90% of our processed foods that contain Genetically Engineered plants or animals.) It also cancels all existing state GMO labeling laws, such as the one passed here in Maine.

And to make sure we don't know whether there are GMOs in our food, it also derails the present method of certifying foods that do not contain GMOs.

All this, even though our food has for years required labeling for all kinds of ingredients and nutrients, and even though GMO labeling is common in other parts of the world.

Why has Monsanto etc. spent millions to defeat state labeling laws and pass this one? Why should we worry about GMOs?

Because they are potentially -- and actually -- dangerous.

The crude, simple-minded technique used to create them was developed long before we came to understand how incredibly complex genes are.

Over millions of years, nature has perfected the mechanism that breeders have used to develop new strains of plants and animals. This mechanism understands the complexity of genes. On the other hand, Monsanto's crude and unpredictable GMO method involves randomly jamming in genes from completely unrelated plants and animals. They do it by bacterial infection or blasting with -- yes -- a gun. Monsanto claims this is no different from natural breeding. You decide.

Back in the early 90s, the FDA's scientists repeatedly and loudly asserted GMOs' potential for serious health hazards. But the FDA ignored them and hired a Monsanto lawyer to establish its GMO policy. In 1992 he overruled the scientists, and the FDA declared GMOs to be essentially the same as regular food.

As a result, the government does no safety studies. It never makes claims of safety. If the GMO companies optionally decide to do such studies, they often refuse to reveal the results. Such studies frequently appear designed to avoid finding problems.

On the other hand, most of the many hundreds of studies that have been carried out without Monsanto and food industry money have shown actual or potential serious health effects: liver and kidney damage, allergens, and tumors, to mention only a few.

Monsanto tells us that trillions of GMO meals have been eaten with no ill effects.

That blatantly ignores the 1989-90 "EMS" epidemic that killed dozens and injured thousands -- many permanently. The victims had eaten supplements produced by a GMO bacteria. The connection was easy to spot because the disease was so acute and startling.

On the other hand, there has been a steep rise in the U.S. in many chronic diseases that has paralleled the rise of GMO foods. There are many reasons to believe there is a causal connection, but it cannot be proven because we can't compare between groups of GMO eaters and non-eaters.

Why? Because there is no GMO labeling to help separate them.

Monsanto and their food friends want it that way. That's what The DARK Act is for.

In response to inquiries on Congressman Poliquin's position on HR 1599, his press secretary, Michael Byerly, said "At this moment, Congressman Bruce Poliquin is listening to Mainer opinions on GMO labeling as he, and his staff, reviews all related GMO labeling bills. Congressman Poliquin values hearing from Mainers on issues and expressing their opinions to his colleagues in Congress. This is why Congressman Poliquin bucked Republican leadership and voted in support of the Country of Origin Labeling Amendment Act to make sure Mainers know where their food comes from."

He did the right thing that time. He says he's listening. Please make sure he does the right thing again: 202-225-6306.

Dick Atlee