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Contact: Daniel Barlow, Public Policy Manager
Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility
802-355-7461 (cell), danielb@vbsr.org

VBSR: New Federal GMO Labeling Bill Bad for Vermont

Business group says federal 'compromise' preempts Vermont's stronger law

Montpelier, VT (June 24, 2016) – Vermont should be incredibly proud of the work it has done to bring transparency to our food system. The state's first in the nation GMO labeling law has sent ripples across the food industry and helped bring that same transparency that Vermonters demanded to food shelves across the country.

Unfortunately, opponents of food transparency continue to try and undermine Vermont's hard work. The latest draft of a so-called compromise bill in the U.S. Senate on GMO labeling would preempt Vermont's law and limit consumers' access to important information concerning the ingredients in the food they buy.

Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility opposes this bill because it:

- Limits transparency by allowing food companies to use electronic codes on packages to indicate the presence of GMO ingredients. This is a significant logistical and technological barrier for consumers. A consumer should not need a smart phone to know what they are buying. VBSR prefers the simplicity of a brief disclosure statement on the label of the products.
- Contains loopholes that would allow food containing a significant amount of genetically engineered ingredients to not carry labels. Vermont's law contains common sense provisions for small amounts of minor ingredients that may be genetically modified. This federal proposal would create the illusion that a consumer is purchasing a GMO-free product when that may not be the case.
- Preempts Vermont law, allowing for a national delay in bringing transparency to the food system. Vermont's law begins July 1 and many major food companies, including brands located here in the state, have already begun labeling or changed to non-GMO ingredients. The federal proposal would allow for another two years of labeling limbo as regulators write the new rules – rules that Vermont has already written.

VBSR supports a nationwide standard for GMO labeling. Food companies need consistent rules and regulations for all their markets across the country and consumers need labeling transparency no matter where they are shopping. Vermont's law, which received strong support from VBSR members, should be seen as a standard for federal law and not swept aside for the convenience of an easy compromise.

We are thankful for Gov. Peter Shumlin's continued support of food transparency and his opposition to the current federal bill. We are also heartened by the concerns expressed by U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders and U.S. Sen. Patrick Leahy's pledge to address the problems with the bill that have been raised by Vermonters and Vermont businesses.

Founded in 1990, VBSR is a statewide, non-profit business association with a mission to advance business ethics that value multiple bottom lines: economic, social, and environmental. Through education, public influence, and workplace quality, VBSR strives to help 760+ members set a high standard for protecting the natural, human, and economic environments of the state's residents, while remaining profitable. Learn more or join the cause at www.vbsr.org.

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