



June 13th 2016

U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Rural Americans are disenfranchised by the DARK Act and Smart Labels

Dear Senator:

The rural community in America used to be the heart and soul of our country, providing the rest of the nation with sustenance, but changing values and shifting resources across the country have left our rural communities disenfranchised. Now, adding another notch on our long list of concerns, such as reduced access to education and healthcare, we have to worry about being kept in the dark when it comes to ingredients in the food we feed our families.

The latest attack on our communities is the attempt to deny rural Americans the right to know what is in their food. The U.S. Senate is currently considering legislation on GMO (genetically modified organism) product labeling and a number of Senators have advocated using “smart labels” or QR codes. They say these “smart labels,” that require consumers to own and use a smartphone, will suffice, but the truth is that so-called “smart” labels specifically deny information to those of us living in rural areas of the country.

We deserve equal access to knowledge about the products we consume, but how can we be assured that access when [more than half](#) of rural Americans do not have a smartphone, let alone the [necessary network coverage](#) that would be required to access the information, and when nearly half (48%) of those who do have smartphones have had service switched off or suspended due to financial hardship? By requiring mandatory smart labeling, basic information would be denied to a huge number of Americans who have a right to know what is in their food – especially those of us in rural regions. Our communities already risk increased exposure to glyphosate, the main chemical in pesticides applied to “Round-up Ready” crops, that WHO has determined probably causes cancer. With these labels, we wouldn’t even be able to tell if it has also been applied to the food we purchase.

There is nothing smart about smart labels. In fact, they would make product information more difficult to access, are deeply discriminatory, and potentially set a dangerous precedent that could allow *all* labeling and nutritional information to be removed from packaging in the future, available only through the same discriminatory technology.

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Some large food corporations have repeatedly tried the usual tactic of fearmongering – claiming that the cost of adding a small line of text on the label simply stating “partially produced with genetic engineering” would be prohibitive, and that the cost would have to be passed onto the consumer therefore negatively impacting low income Americans. Of course, this argument is false. Numerous companies including Campbell’s, General Mills, ConAgra, Kellogg and Mars have recently introduced on-package labels for products containing GMOs in order to comply with Vermont’s mandatory GMO labeling law and have assured consumers that the price will not be affected by their decision.

It is unacceptable to allow corporations to prevent rural Americans from getting the information they need to make informed choices about the food they buy and feed their families. [National polls](#) consistently show that 90 to 95 percent of Americans support labeling. Consumers across the country want to know what is in the food they buy and feed their families – and that includes whether or not it has been genetically engineered. However, the use of smart label technology does not give Americans the transparent knowledge they deserve. Mandatory conspicuous on-package labeling is required. By allowing companies to use smart labels, a huge number of rural Americans would be denied the right to know what’s in their food because they cannot afford a smartphone. It is essential that mandatory labeling of GMO products through the use of smart labels is stopped, and we urge you to take action by voting against the blatant attempt to deny rural Americans the right to know what is in their food.

Yours Sincerely,

Center for Food Safety, Washington, DC

National Family Farm Coalition, Washington, DC

Rural Coalition/Coalición Rural, Washington, DC

National Latino Farmers & Ranchers Trade Association, Washington, DC

Alabama State Association of Cooperatives, Forkland, AL

Alianza Nacional de Campesinas, Oxnard, CA

Atrisco, Atrisco, NM

BioRegional Strategies, Truchas, NM

Center for Family Farm Development, Inc., Decatur, GA

Community Alliance for Global Justice, Seattle, WA

Conejos Clean Water, Antonito, CO

Desert Forge and the Warrior Farmer Project, Albuquerque, NM

Ecohermanas, Washington, DC

Family Farm Defenders, Madison, WI

Farmworker Association of Florida, Inc., Apopka, FL

Federation of Southern Cooperatives Rural Training and Research Center, Epes, AL

Greene County Democrat, Eutaw, AL

Indian Nations Conservation Alliance, Twin Bridges, MT

Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, Minneapolis, MN

Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement, Des Moines, IA

Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society, Ceresco, NE

Northwest Forest Worker Center, Albany, CA

PLBA Housing Development Corporation, Gainesville, Alabama

Roots of Change, Oakland, CA

Rural Development Leadership Network, New York, NY

Rural Vermont, Montpelier, VT

Slow Food Nebraska, Omaha, NE

Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group, Fayetteville, AR

Taos County Economic Development Corporation, Taos, NM

Texas Mexico Border Coalition Community Based Organization, San Isidro, TX

Western Sustainable Agriculture Working Group, Austin, NV