

# 70 groups tell Obama: Don't restrict GMO labeling in trade agreements

## Consumer rights on the table in US-EU trade talks

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Seventy consumer, farm and food groups, and businesses [urged](#) the Obama Administration in a [letter](#) today not to restrict efforts to label genetically modified foods in the ongoing and secret U.S.-EU trade talks.

Through negotiations on the Transatlantic Free Trade Agreement (TAFTA) with the European Union, the U.S. Trade Representative seeks to establish common regulations covering consumer protections, and has targeted the European Union's regulations of genetically modified foods, which includes consumer labeling. U.S. and EU agribusiness firms have been open about their desire to eliminate GMO labeling laws under TAFTA—including the rising number of U.S. states moving to require GMO labeling.

"Once again, the USTR is working to give corporations their TAFTA-created 'rights' to violate the rights and wishes of people to know what is in their food," said Dena Hoff, VP of the National Family Farm Coalition. "GMO labeling is desired by at least three of every four consumers; it is time for the USTR to respect the sovereignty of nations and the desires of the people who live in them instead of telling consumers to 'eat and shut up, or else.'"

The groups [expressed concerns](#) that a TAFTA chapter called "technical barriers to trade" would limit governments' ability to maintain or establish product labels for consumers. This year, Vermont was the first state to pass required GMO labeling without any restrictions. Maine and Connecticut passed GMO labeling laws last year contingent on neighboring states also passing GMO labeling laws. More than 20 states are also considering laws, including major GMO labeling initiatives on the ballot in Colorado and Oregon this fall.

"The push to 'harmonize' standards in TAFTA could undermine many important efforts by states to raise the bar on food safety, labeling or other efforts to rebuild our food system so it works for farmers and consumers," said the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy's Karen Hansen-Kuhn. "We need to encourage those innovative, citizen-led approaches, not limit them to what trade bureaucrats deem is acceptable."

The Obama Administration has prioritized corporate rights within the negotiations, including the highly controversial Investor-State provision, which grants corporations the right to use secret tribunals to challenge state, local or national laws they view as potentially limiting to expected future profits. Past investor-state cases have targeted regulations on toxic waste, land use rules and water and timber policies. The Grocery Manufacturers Association is already suing the state of Vermont under U.S. law to challenge GMO labeling. TAFTA rules would provide the GMA with another legal tool to attack U.S. laws.

"By requiring labeling the food industry will become more transparent, which leads to greater accountability to a wide range of stakeholders," said Richard Eidlin, at the American Sustainable Business Council. "Labeling, as we have seen from cigarettes, alcohol and many other consumer products, helps to protect the public as well as foster greater business competition and innovation."

The negotiating text for TAFTA remains secret, with only parts of drafts being leaked to the public. The groups [called on](#) the U.S. and EU to make the negotiating text public—and pledged to oppose any deal that undermines consumer’s right to know what is in the food they purchase and feed their families.

[Read the full letter.](#)