Since their introduction, GE food crops have been mired in controversy. First authorized for field testing in the US in 1986 and made commercially available in 1996, GE crops are both derided as “Frankenfoods” and lauded for their hunger-eliminating potential. More than 60 percent of all processed foods available today contain GE ingredients such as soy, corn, or canola; and because in the U.S. there is no mandate that GE food be labeled, most people have been unknowingly eating them for years. Members of the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility contend that all GE foods should be labeled so that consumers have the opportunity to make more informed food choices.

There are significant concerns regarding increased allergens in GE foods and even scientific disagreement over whether genetically engineered crops actually outperform their conventionally grown rivals. For this reason, ICCR members apply the precautionary principle to the use of GE foods; that is, in the absence of scientific consensus, the burden of proving their safety falls to companies. As shareholders in agriculture, food and food service companies, we believe that the failure to adequately assess the risks of GE ingredients may expose them to liabilities and the public to health risks.

In recent years, several weeds have built up resistance to the herbicides used on GE crops driving the use of more, and multiple, industrialized herbicides to kill them. Who is looking long-term, for the protection of the consumer and the food system and who will bear the risk? These issues are critical and the regulatory system is not adequately addressing them.

Members of the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility have been engaging food producers and retailers as shareholders on GE foods for over a decade. Progress has been slow but consistent: After engaging with ICCR members, Starbucks committed to using only non-rBGH dairy products in its stores; Hain Celestial developed a brochure clarifying its policies regarding GE foods; Heinz pledged to avoid GE ingredients in its products; Dow, DuPont and Monsanto established “Principles for Biotechnology” and do not engineer food crops for drugs or industrial chemicals. Before the technology advances any further and GE foods become too embedded in our food system we need long-term studies to better understand how they interact with the planet’s ecosystem, including their impact on animal and human health. Failure to do our due diligence on this could have disastrous consequences for agricultural sustainability and thus, our world’s food supply.

At minimum, we all have a right to know what we’re eating, GE or not.

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