Testimony of Jerry Greenfield, Co-Founder, Ben & Jerry’s Homemade, Inc to the Connecticut State General Assembly, Committee on Children

in support of

Removing the Trigger from CT’s GMO Labeling Law

March 3, 2016

On behalf of all of us at Ben & Jerry’s, I want to thank the Committee on Children for this opportunity to provide testimony in support of removing the trigger from Connecticut’s GMO labeling law. I am Jerry Greenfield, the Jerry in Ben & Jerry’s. I bring you greetings from Vermont, where beginning July 1st of this year, food products sold in Vermont grocery stores will be required to disclose the presence of GMOs. Despite what you may have heard from opponents of GMO labeling, the sky over our lovely state is not falling, nor do we expect it to on July 1st. I’d like to thank the legislators who are moving H.B. 5300 through the legislative process.

So, I am here today to encourage you in the warmest, yet strongest possible way, to join my home state of Vermont in implementing mandatory GMO labeling by removing the trigger from Connecticut’s law. People ought to have the right to know what’s in the food they are eating and companies ought to be proud to disclose the ingredients they use.

I'd like to focus my remarks today on three main areas.

• Our position on transparency and a consumer right to know, and specifically mandatory labeling of genetically engineered food.
• Why we think Connecticut should join Vermont in implanting GMO labeling by removing the trigger clause.
• And on the question of whether mandating labeling of GMO food would have any impact on food prices at the supermarket.

First, I’ll discuss our position on transparency and labeling. At Ben & Jerry's, we are pleased to stand with the many consumers, companies, advocates, and policy makers in supporting the push to require mandatory labeling of food products made with genetically engineered ingredients. We strongly believe that people have a right to know what’s in the food they eat. And that only by providing information on a products packaging can we ensure peoples freedom to choose what’s in the food they purchase.

Just like labels that require disclosure of farm raised salmon or orange juice from
concentrate, labeling of GE food will provide consumers the information they need to make choices for themselves and their families. At Ben & Jerry’s we've been long-standing proponents of a consumer’s right to know. We work incredibly hard to source ingredients that reflect our values as a company and we are thrilled to tell you about them. It’s hard to imagine why any company wouldn’t be proud to tell you about the ingredients they are using.

It’s clear that when the General Assembly passed the GMO labeling law in 2013, with a trigger, there were concerns about going it alone. However, much has changed since Connecticut passed its legislation. Maine and Vermont have passed legislation requiring mandatory labeling of GMOs, with Vermont’s law set to begin implementation on July 1st. Massachusetts, New York, and Rhode Island all have bills moving through various stages of the legislative process. For all the reasons you found to pass Connecticut’s law in 2013 are the same reasons why you should remove the trigger and join Vermont in moving forward with implantation.

Let me spend a minute talking about packaging, and why opponents of labeling who suggest that it will raise food prices are simply wrong. Let me give you a little background on how we manage packaging at Ben & Jerry's, which I hope will help you understand why a small label changes to food products are neither onerous nor costly.

The overwhelming majority of Ben & Jerry's packaging is for our pint business. We have about 50 different SKUs in our portfolio at any given time. Every year we drop a few flavors and add a few more. There are a number of reason why food companies would make changes to their packaging. From the ever evolving regulatory landscape to allergen concerns, ingredient and formula changes, new marketing claims, as well as updates to a brand’s look and feel.

As a food company, we regularly make changes, sometimes big, sometimes small to our packaging. In fact, every year, we make changes to between 25% and 50% of our packaging. Over the last 7 years, we’ve gone through three full line redesigns. That’s changing every single pint in our line.

For food companies, evolving packaging is just part of doing business. At Ben & Jerry's we manage our packaging inventory very closely, so that as our packaging evolves, we can do it without having to throw away out of date packaging.

The truth is, there are risks to food businesses in sitting on large inventories of packaging. In 2013, we achieved Fairtrade certification across our entire product line of flavors. And so we added the Fairtrade mark to all of our pints. It was a rolling transition for our pints as we phased in the Fairtrade-certified ingredients and then added the claim to our packaging. As we went through this process, for our top selling flavors, we were literally ordering packaging on a weekly basis. For our second tier flavors, we were ordering packaging every three weeks. The important point here, is that this change to every single pint package in our line, of adding the Fairtrade certification mark was not a cost that passed through to consumers. It did not impact our pricing at all.
There are a number of things that could potentially impact the cost of our products, first and foremost dairy prices. And while there are a variety of things that can impact the price a consumer pays at retail for a pint of Ben & Jerry's, small changes in our packaging is not one of them.

So with that in mind, I’d urge you to remove the trigger and join Vermont in standing up for people’s right to know what’s in their food.

I'd like to thank you again for this opportunity to testify. I’d be happy to answer any questions you may have.