

March 24, 2015

The Honorable K. Michael Conaway
Chairman
House Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Collin C. Peterson
Ranking Member
House Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Conaway and Ranking Member Peterson,

Our organizations have a substantial interest in the development and commercialization of biotechnology-derived agricultural products. Likewise, the House Agriculture Committee has provided strong support of technological advances to enhance the productivity and profitability of America's farmers, ranchers and growers.

We applaud the Committee for advancing public discussion and examining policy regarding biotechnology in 2015. We are particularly grateful the committee will conduct a hearing to evaluate the benefits of national, uniform, and voluntary labeling programs to help satisfy legitimate consumer interest in knowing which food products do not contain ingredients derived from genetically engineered plants. Providing clear, consistent information to consumers without advantaging, or disadvantaging, one kind of crop production system over another is very important to us.

The Committee's expertise on farming, agricultural innovation, and the rural economy is very valuable as we seek to resolve the food labeling challenge at the national level. Your members are in a position to acutely understand the risks to agriculture associated with mandatory labeling for foods containing biotechnology-derived ingredients. While advocates of mandatory labeling do not dispute the science that biotechnology is safe, all too often some have sought to use labeling as a way to force food companies to stop using biotechnology-derived ingredients. Consumers will pay the ultimate price in having fewer options in the grocery store aisle while paying more in the checkout line.

Their efforts, if successful, would have a chilling effect on farmers, innovation, and the economy, but there is a broader impact as well. Agriculture must have the ability in the future to grow more food crops in tougher climate, soil, and weather conditions. The population of our planet will grow to 9.6 billion people by 2050 – 25 percent more than today. Farmers in the U.S. and elsewhere will be required to grow twice as much food to feed hungry people. How can we accomplish this serious task if we remove an important tool from the modern agricultural toolbox?

For these reasons and more, we urge the House Agriculture Committee to continue its active and public engagement in support of national, uniform, and voluntary food labeling policies that provide consumers with information while strengthening agricultural innovation. We look forward to working with you in this regard and pledge to be helpful as you discuss what can often be a controversial subject back home and in Washington.

Sincerely,

American Farm Bureau Federation
Agricultural Retailers Association
American Seed Trade Association
American Soybean Association
American Sugarbeet Growers Association
Biotechnology Industry Organization
National Corn Growers Association
National Cotton Council
National Council of Farmer Cooperatives
National Potato Council