



Many observers believed that the defeat of California's Proposition 37 at the polls last November spelled a significant-and perhaps fatal-political setback for state and national efforts to require labeling of genetically engineered food products. But two recent articles from the New York Times suggest that the GMO labeling movement is far from dead.

Last week the [Times reported](#) that Whole Foods Market plans to require labeling of all genetically modified foods sold in its 339 stores in the U.S. and Canada. (The European Union already requires such labeling, so Whole Foods' seven stores in Great Britain are unaffected by the newly announced policy.) Whole Foods, which projects the new labeling requirement will be in place within five years, said that the policy comes in response to customer demand. The company becomes the first retailer in the U.S. to require genetically modified food labels and some observers believe, in the words of the Times report, that Whole Foods' action could "radically alter the food industry."

In a related development, the [Times recently reported](#) that major food companies such as ConAgra and PepsiCo, along with WalMart, the nation's largest grocery store operator, have been quietly meeting in Washington, D.C. to discuss whether to advocate a national labeling program for genetically modified foods. It's not that these corporations strongly favor such a national labeling requirement; far from it. But it appears that corporate food growers, processors and grocers would rather deal with a single, national standard than a disparate set of state and local labeling measures.

And the latter remains a very real scenario, despite the defeat of California's Proposition 37 in last November's election. Advocates of genetically modified food labels in Washington State have already qualified an initiative measure for that state's ballot that's modeled closely on the failed California measure. Missourians will soon vote on a GMO labeling initiative measure as well. Meanwhile, GMO labeling proposals for food products have been introduced in the Vermont, Connecticut and New Mexico legislatures. And the Times reports "a swelling consumer boycott of some 'natural' brands owned by major food

companies,” along with consumers mounting a “sort of guerrilla movement in supermarkets, pasting warning stickers on products suspected of having GMO ingredients from food companies that oppose labeling.” Finally, a consumer/voter backlash has emerged on Facebook, Twitter and other social media, focused on those companies that spent millions of dollars last year in their successful campaign to defeat Proposition 37.

California environmental measures like AB 32 (the Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006) and Proposition 65 (a.k.a., the Safe Drinking Water and Toxic Enforcement Act of 1986) are often cited as pioneering legislation that has had a catalytic effect in other states and nations. But it would be far more remarkable if nationally mandated or voluntary labeling of genetically modified foods were to rise, phoenix-like, from the ashes of last year’s political defeat of California’s Proposition 37.

But it looks like that may just happen.