

Spotlight: 21st Century Food Labels Part 3 of 4









September 2017

☀️ The Food Label Talk Show: New Season

It's been said that food labels have become the bare-your-soul platform of the food industry, wherein minute details of the origin and creation of processed foods are publicly displayed for all to see, and judge. No issue sparks more polarity amongst stakeholders than does the aspect of genetically-modified (GM) food labelling. Currently, the USA is centre stage.

☀️ The USA dichotomy

The USA was the first country to commercialize a GM crop – the FlavrSavr® tomato in 1994. Yet, it is the only country in which neither pre-market notification nor GM-food labelling, is mandatory.

Jurisdiction	Mandatory Pre-market Notification Legislation (Y/N)		Mandatory GM-Labelling Legislation (Y/N)	
	Y	N	Y	N
EU 	✓ 2003		✓ 1997 Ex: adventitious <0.9%	
Canada 	✓ 1999		N/A	✓
USA 	N/A	✓	N/A	✓
AU/NZ 	✓ 2001		✓ 2001 Ex: adventitious <1%	
Brazil 	✓ 2005, '06, '07		✓ 2003 Ex: adventitious <1%; + symbol	
Argentina 	✓ 2003		N/A	✓
Japan 	✓ 2003		✓ 2000	
China 	✓ 1993, 2001		✓ 2004	

☀️ Vermont: bottom-up game changer

By January 2015, mandatory GM-labelling had been debated in [25 of the 50 State Legislatures](#) – either rejected, deferred for further review, or, as in the case of Vermont, passed, to become effective July 1, 2016. As other States began to align with Vermont, major food processors, such as [Campbell's](#) took pre-emptive action in the form of voluntary GM-labelling, so as to circumvent a nation-wide patchwork of State-level GM-food labelling across the USA.

☀️ Feds pulled rank over Vermont

US Congress also foresaw the impracticality of State-level GM-food labelling. After deep debate, [The National Bioengineered Food Disclosure Standard](#) was passed and signed by President Obama on July 29, 2016. “The Standard” comes into force in July 2018; it defines nationwide GM-food labelling content and permits disclosure through text, QR codes or phone access. The USDA was directed, within the intervening period, to determine the most effective means of communicating GM content on food labels. In August 2016, the State of Vermont issued a press release, [rescinding the Vermont GM-labelling regulations](#).

☀️ Where they're at

Somehow, the Standard was included in Trump's June 2017 non-descript ["2017 Inactive List"](#) (the importance and effect of which no one seems to know) which alarmed stakeholders, fearing a default to the patchwork of State-level GM-food labelling. Nevertheless, the USDA shouldered on, and, during the same month, released a [30-point questionnaire to stakeholders, including international trading partners](#), which closed August 25th. If nothing else, this comprehensive survey illustrates the complexity of mandatory GM-food labelling. Interested parties are awaiting not only the results, but, the USDA interpretation, as the study's findings will shape and underpin the finer details of GM-food labelling.

☀️ Proactive industry action

In the private sector, it's business as usual. This month, [Whole Foods](#) published its GM-food labelling policy, which also becomes effective July 2018, in the form of direct email communication to its many suppliers. Except for a few minor quirks of its own, Whole Foods' GM-food labelling policy is subservient to the federal GM-food labelling Standard, and clearly states that the retailer will not undertake GM-food labelling which is inconsistent with any existing food regulations, the Standard included. **FF**