

Gmo (business ethics) essay examples

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Genetic engineering is a boon to the food sector. Plants and animals are genetically modified (GM) to increase the yield, make them disease or pest tolerant and ensure nutritious food is available to all. There may be a chance for the introduced genes to pass through the food to the consumer but any harm it can cause can only be judged based on the food's toxic or allergic properties. Unless direct evidence linking negative health impact to consumption of GM food is available, GM foods need not be prohibited. Companies have the moral duty to inform consumers about any food they market especially, in case of GM foods if, they have properties different from their native counterparts. GM Food sector includes bio-engineered crop cultivators or animal breeders, processed food manufacturers, who derive part or whole of their ingredients from GM crops as well as restaurant owners, who might use GM foods in their preparations. All these stakeholders have to ensure and uphold the consumer's safety.

GM Foods and Fear of Health Risks

GM foods with traits from other plants could pose an inadvertent allergy risk. In case of a particular variant of GM soya bean, genes were introduced from Brazil nut into the parent soya bean to enhance its nutritional quality. But, people who were allergic to Brazil nut showed a similar response to the GM soya bean as well during the testing stage. So, the variant product was abandoned (Palmer, 2013). Another concern with GM foods is that the engineered genes might transfer from the food to humans, animals, or pathogenic microbes i. e. the fear of horizontal gene transfer. Several researchers have concluded that there is only a negligible chance for the genes from GM food to survive digestion and remain intact. However, in case

of people with some medical condition, in which their digestive system is compromised, some amount of the genetically engineered material appear in their excretions. Horizontal gene transfer research is still a growing field and studies that show any harmful health impact linked to this aspect of GM food consumption are none (Palmer, 2013).

GM Food Labeling Present Scenario

GM food crops that have raised public concern include corn, canola, soya bean, tomato, papaya, wheat, flax and cotton. These crops are used as such, or oil and starch derived from them are used in soups, sauces, salad dressings, cereals, snacks and breads. GM food labeling or specific indication of bioengineering in the food and its ingredients can help consumers make the choice of consuming it or not. However, the burden of ensuring the GM food is safe, just as any other product intended for human consumption, lies on the developer (U. S. Food and Drug Administration [FDA], 2001). There seems to be very less consensus in making GM labeling compulsory among different countries of the world. While Japan, EU and Australia have adopted mandatory GM labeling, US and Canada have chosen to implement only voluntary labeling (Business Ethics, 2010).

Voluntary vs Mandatory GM labeling

According to FDA's draft guidance on voluntary labeling of bioengineered food (2001), the label should indicate any significant changes in the engineered food due to genetic modification, from its native counterpart. A modification in the food's brand name could be used. Significant variation in nutritional properties, any known allergic responses and toxic effects if any,

should also be indicated. The developer has to ensure the GM food has been tested in accordance with FDA guidelines.

Mandatory GM labeling would mean more stringent analysis of each and every ingredient of the food and setting limits for the percentage of bioengineering i. e. a threshold of genetic modification would be allowed and beyond that, the food might be rated with numbers to signify degree of genetic modification. This would mean more strict regulatory norms, monitoring and enforcement. All this would in turn translate into cost of the product and finally affect the consumer. Further, past experience in countries such as Japan and New Zealand have not shown increase in customer choice through mandatory labeling. Certain food companies would rather use non-GM or certified organic labeling as a tool to attract consumers. In US, foods branded with USDA organic are not genetically modified but they may be resulted from hybridization or tissue culture methods (Byrne, 2014).

Informed consumers and GM Food Market

A GM food company may choose to provide only required information to consumers or may choose to give additional, optional information too.

Branding corn syrup made from GM corn, as “ Bioengineered Corn” or “ GM Corn” is required information, whereas mentioning high-yielding variety of crop seeds as these are modified for better yield is only optional (FDA, 2001).

In the current situation, public information norms regarding GM foods are not very clear i. e. each country has a different policy (Caswell, 2000). Especially in case of exporting GM products from US to EU, there have been considerable issues in the past. A moratorium was passed for US based GM

corn, cotton and soya bean in EU for six years from 1996 to 2003, and there was a call for mandatory labeling. This was found to be against World Trade Organization's (WTO) rules and US won the row. However, after the ban was lifted in 2004, the European commission approved 30 GM foods after safety assessment (Borger, 2006).

Companies choosing to provide truthful information about their products can gain consumer acceptance. Consumers in general like and accept foods with good nutritional benefits and quality. So, bioengineering targeted towards development of foods with superior qualities, coupled with effective labeling can be used to gain consumer trust. The cost of regulatory testing and appropriate labeling could be offset by improved market performance in the long run.

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