

## **Mandatory labelling only way forward say NGOs** **Voluntary Standard Made for Industry, Not Consumers**

OTTAWA, Sept. 8 /CNW/ - Non-governmental organizations slammed the results of the latest vote from the Canadian General Standards Board Committee on Voluntary Labelling of Foods Obtained or Not Obtained Through Genetic Modification. Ballot results released today reveal that the government-industry committee has reached a consensus on a voluntary labelling standard for genetically engineered foods.

"Voluntary labelling of GE Frankenfood is a sham and is unlikely to lead to one label on one GE product in one of Canada's grocery stores," said Patrick Venditti of Greenpeace. "This is a bogus standard that has been manufactured by industry and government to avoid a proper mandatory labelling regime for GE foods."

As it is voluntary, no labels on GE foods will be required. The standard also allows for products containing 5% GE material to be labelled non-GE. Of the thirty-eight votes in favour of the standard, twenty represent industry, while nine represent various levels of government. All consumer groups involved in the process either voted against or withdrew from the process. Polls have consistently shown that over 90% of Canadians want labels on GE food.

"Enough is enough. Ottawa knows that Canadians want a mandatory labelling policy and it is high time that this government did something about it," said Nadège Adam of the Council of Canadians. "Canadians want labels that protect human health and the environment, not industry profits and government bureaucrats."

"None of the GE crops grown in Canada have undergone chronic (long-term) testing," said Bradford Duplisa of the Canadian Health Coalition. "The reality is that no one knows if GE foods are safe to eat. People who don't want to eat these untested products should be able to avoid them, but without mandatory labelling they can't." The Royal Society of Canada expert panel agreed that GE foods were not regulated strongly and that the system needed an overhaul.

The voluntary labelling committee is but one in a long list of government maneuvers aimed at avoiding a mandatory labelling policy. The government organized the defeat of Bill C-287 - a private member's bill to establish mandatory labelling - and promised to hold parliamentary hearings instead. Shortly after starting however, the Health committee suspended hearings.

"Jean Chrétien should do the right thing before leaving office and give Canadians their long awaited mandatory labelling standard," says Lucy Sharratt from the Polaris Institute.

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