United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 22, 2013

Commissioner Margaret Hamburg
U.S. Food and Drug Administration
10903 New Hampshire Avenue
Silver Spring, MD 20993

Dear Commissioner Hamburg,

We write to urge the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to finalize its guidance document on labeling of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) marketed as food or food additives. We encourage the FDA to implement a regulatory framework that will promote transparency for consumers while providing producers with the certainty they need to label their products appropriately.

Under the 1986 Coordinated Framework for Regulation of Biotechnology (51 FR 23303), the FDA, U.S Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) have managed the genetic engineering of organisms for both agricultural and non-agricultural purposes. However, in recent years, the field of bioengineering has advanced rapidly, and the prevalence of GMOs in the American food market has raised concerns regarding the capacity of existing regulations to keep up with the development and marketing of these products.

Since the FDA issued its draft guidance on the labeling of GMO foods (00D-1598) on January 18, 2001, the United States has become a leader in the production of food products containing GMOs. While there has been no scientific consensus on whether widely available GMO foods are less healthy or nutritious than their non-GMO counterparts, the increasing prevalence of these products in the American food supply has driven consumer demands for clarity with regard to how these products can be marketed. With this in mind, we write to support the FDA's implementation of regulations to ensure that the labeling of GMO products is fair, standardized and transparent.

Adopting a series of uniform labeling standards will have important market implications for both GMO and non-GMO products. Standardized labels will prevent misleading or confusing information from being presented to consumers which will help them make informed purchasing decisions that will encourage market competition. Furthermore, a reliable standard will promote transparency through labels that accurately reflect the most advanced scientific information available.

For producers, standardization will provide stability and ensure that labels provide correct information. In addition, finalizing labeling guidelines and regulations will benefit producers wishing to label their products based on consumer demand for these labels. For consumers, market-driven labeling ensures that the information they demand about the food being sold on grocery store shelves is clear and accurate, without the confusion of dozens of different standards or labels.

That is why we call on the FDA to finalize the principles outlined in its 2001 draft guidance and implement a regulatory framework for the standardization of labeling policies for GMO and non-GMO foods.

Sincerely,

Mark Udall
U.S. Senator

Elizabeth Warren
U.S. Senator