

Labeling of GE Seeds Required in Vermont

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Kerr Says Labels will be Required on Genetically Engineered Seeds

MONTPELIER, Vt. -- Companies selling genetically engineered seeds in the state will have to include a "plain English disclosure" on labels, the agriculture secretary has decided.

The words, "these seeds have been genetically engineered," will have to appear on the label, Agriculture Secretary Steve Kerr said.

Companies will have to specify what traits have been conferred through biotechnology.

Kerr described his decision in an e-mail to advocates on how he expects seed companies to comply with a new state law requiring the labeling of all genetically engineered seeds sold in Vermont.

The law went into effect on Oct. 1 without rules and without any guidance from the Agency of Agriculture about how labels of genetically engineered seed should be worded to satisfy the law. Kerr said at the time that he felt the law was "very clear" without rules and that he wanted to give companies some flexibility in how they complied.

But shortly thereafter, St. Louis, Mo.-based Monsanto Corp. and Indianapolis-based Dow AgroSciences, two major biotech companies that sell genetically engineered seeds, indicated publicly that they did not intend to use the words, "genetically engineered" on their seed labels next year.

"It seemed like the industry was thumbing its nose at the law," said Ben Davis, environmental advocate at the Vermont Public Interest Group, who then asked Kerr to clarify the agency's position on labeling. Kerr provided that last week.

Kerr said his agency would send a letter to biotech seed companies in the next few days with instructions for compliance.

Kerr said he found it necessary to specify language for the labels after seed company representatives canceled a meeting with him on the subject, which was slated for Monday. "I wanted to make sure labels are properly done this year. I don't want any excuses from (seed companies) that we didn't give them enough time," he said.

Some advocates for the law saw Kerr's actions in a different light.

Rep. David Zuckerman, P-Burlington, the law's original lead sponsor in the House, said, "The administration is doing what it knows it should do. I'm glad that they finally put it in writing so we can move on."

Kerr defended his decision not to specify labeling language earlier by saying that he wanted to see what seed companies would propose on their own.

Kerr said he also wants to be careful in his actions not to scare biotech companies away from Vermont entirely.

TITLE: Kerr says labels will be required on genetically engineered seeds

SOURCE: Associated Press / boston.com, USA

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Published on NW Resistance Against Genetic Engineering (<http://nwrage.org>)

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kerr_says_labels_will_be_required_on_genetically_engineered_seeds
DATE: 1 Nov 2004

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