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Reply-to: info@foodpolicyfund.org
To: paedc@aol.com
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Immediate Release

Media Contact: Laurie Cohen Peters
lauriecohenpeters@yahoo.com

California Religious Leaders support Prop 37— Labeling of Genetically Modified Foods

Christian, Jewish, and Hindu faith leaders are urging their congregations to vote for Proposition 37, which would require labeling of genetically modified foods sold in California. Several clergy appear in videotaped interviews www.faithandgmos.com. There are many reasons why religious leaders support labeling.

Widespread religious enthusiasm for Prop 37 has been expected. Not only do 91% of Americans want GMOs labeled, religious bodies around the world have long supported mandatory labeling, which is already enjoyed by the people of about 50 countries. Some religious bodies go further. The current policy on genetics of the World Council of Churches, for example, calls on people to “Build partnerships with civil society, peoples’ movements, farmers and indigenous peoples to oppose genetic engineering in agriculture.”

Christian Faith Leaders

The United Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church USA, and a study committee of the **Evangelical Lutheran Church** have all called for genetically engineered foods to be labeled. The **California Council of Churches** is an endorser to Prop 37. And the **World Council of Churches**, an ecumenical body made up of more than 300 denominations from around the world, warned that the failure to label is a special kind of lying. They write: "...the refusal to allow the labeling of GMOs is itself a hiding of the truth, but also makes it impossible to ensure the integrity of the trade in food." In their 2006 statement on Caring For Life, the Council urged its members to fight for labeling for the health and well-being of this and future generations.

Rev. Lyndon Harris, the Los Angeles based Episcopal Priest who was in charge of St. Paul's Chapel across the street from the World Trade Center, points out that "the Global Anglican Communion has come out against Genetically Modified Organisms." The **General Convention of the Episcopal Church** "support(s) the rights of consumers to know the source and content of their food stuffs," and Rev. Harris agrees. "We have a right to know. I am encouraging all involved to work to have GMOs labeled—Proposition 37 in the state of California."

Rev. Harris, who ran a rescue operation after the World Trade Center attack, also has several concerns "about the proliferation about GMOs in our food supply." He says, "If the science, as it indicates, is true, there are serious risks for consuming genetically modified organisms." Rev. Harris avoids buying GMOs and shares his concerns with others, "especially people who are having illness and disease."

He is concerned about the mixing of genes between plants and animals, and about the lack of safety studies conducted on GMOs before they are placed into our diet. "It's one thing to experiment," he says, but "quite another thing to introduce genetically modified organisms GMOs into the food supply without giving due lab testing."

Rev. Dr. Dudley D. Chapman, pastor of the **Greater Community Missionary Baptist church in Pacoima, California**, doesn't think it's fair to give people food without disclosing what's in it. He says, "I would vote for

putting a GMO label on the can, the bottle, on whatever you are eating so you have a choice.” From a religious perspective, he says, “We definitely and positively want truth. And to be untrue to me, and not telling me what I’m eating, is definitely a sin.” Beyond labeling, Rev. Chapman, like many other Christian leaders, opposes the practice of genetically engineering our food from a religious perspective. “It’s abominable,” he says. “I like the way God made the stuff in the first place. It’s just right. ... Everything is so well organized and so well fixed, that hey, why fix what’s already working.” To his congregation, he says, “if there’s any way possible, you should get there to vote to make sure food is labeled when they have GMO ingredients in it. I will vote YES on Prop 37.”

Reverend Peter H. Rood of the Holy Nativity Episcopal Church in Westchester, CA, says, “We have to be informed... I intend to vote yes on Prop 37.” He invites those in his religious community to do the same. Rev. Rood is also concerned about the lack of awareness about GMOs in general, and is predisposed against the use of genetically engineered foods as a whole. “It takes my breath away when I think about how many folks in my congregation have no idea.” He adds, “It means as a pastor, I’m just going to have to educate all the more to raise consciousness and have folks be active in taking responsibility to stand against this practice.”

Jewish Faith Leaders

Rabbi Elihu Gevirtz says that when tomatoes, corn and other fruits and vegetables are produced with genes from pork or shellfish or scorpions, which are not kosher, he needs the foods labeled as GMO in order to avoid them. “If you can’t trust the food that you eat, how can you take care of your children? Labeling food as GMO enables us to make a conscious choice about the content of our food.” He also says, “The Torah tells us clearly not to put different species together. GMOs are dangerous spiritually. They are a symptom of a spiritual crisis for humanity in which we have overstepped our boundaries. It is not humanity's role to create new species; it is God's.”

Hindu Faith Leaders

Swami Ishwarananda, from Chinmaya Mission in Los Angeles, believes that genetic engineering interferes with the natural food that is made by God. As such, “It’s not good for the body.” The Swami says the ancient Vedic practice of Ayurvedic medicine “starts with the right kind of food.” But with genetic engineering, “when certain such modifications in the very structure of the food is done, we have no clue about whether it is the right thing to eat at all or not.” He considers GMOs to be dangerous to health and advises his congregation, “Please do not consume them.” For that,” he says, “labeling is a must. We should support that proposition[37].”

For original sources, <http://www.faithandgmos.org>

Media Contact: Laurie Cohen Peters
Institute for Responsible Technology Food Policy Fund
lauriecohenpeters@yahoo.com

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