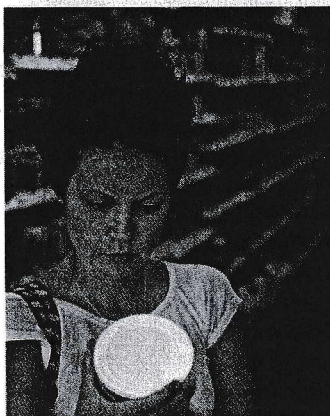


## AAAS Position on GM Foods Could Backfire

WE ARE WRITING TO URGE AAAS TO RECONSIDER ITS POLICY AGAINST MANDATED LABELING OF so-called genetically modified (GM) foods (1). We do not, as a group, have any position on GM foods, for or against, but we are concerned that AAAS's position represents a poorly informed approach to communicating science.

Successful communication requires mutual trust and a perception of shared values. Appearing to withhold information that people want (whether they want it for reasons we agree with or not) about the food that they eat stands an excellent chance of eroding both of these. Decades of social science research on science communication processes have demonstrated that these elements are almost certainly more important than science literacy in determining public attitudes and opinions. And science itself is built on an ethos of transparency and open dialogue that appears inconsistent with AAAS's position in this situation.



The recent California vote defeating an attempt to require GM labeling was immediately followed by a pledge from its supporters to pursue this issue at the national level (2). The debate is clearly not over yet. AAAS should let citizens decide this question, which is not a matter of science per se but of public preferences, values, and concerns.

Strategically, appearing to be less than transparent is a really bad idea for the scientific community. Ethically, we believe that people, both as citizens and as consumers, have a right to information that they feel is relevant to their decisions. The most constructive way to address many people's lingering concerns about GM foods is to provide them with the information that they consistently deem relevant, even if this requires new regulation.

SUSANNA HORNIG PRIEST,<sup>1</sup> JOANN M. VALENTI,<sup>2\*</sup> ROBERT A. LOGAN,<sup>3</sup> CAROL L. ROGERS,<sup>4</sup>  
SHARON DUNWOODY,<sup>5</sup> ROBERT J. GRIFFIN,<sup>6</sup> MARILEE LONG,<sup>7</sup> SHARON M. FRIEDMAN,<sup>8</sup>  
S. HOLLY STOCKING,<sup>9</sup> KATHERINE E. ROWAN,<sup>10</sup> JOCELYN STEINKE<sup>11</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Associate Professor Emeritus, Department of Journalism, Texas A&M University, Olympia, WA 98502, USA. <sup>2</sup>Professor Emeritus, College of Fine Arts and Communications, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602, USA; Tampa, FL 33606, USA. <sup>3</sup>Professor Emeritus, School of Journalism, University of Missouri—Columbia/Columbia, MO 65205, USA; Bethesda, MD 20852, USA. <sup>4</sup>Philip Merrill College of Journalism, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742–7111, USA. <sup>5</sup>School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Wisconsin—Madison, Madison, WI 53706, USA. <sup>6</sup>Diederich College of Communication, Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI 53201–1881, USA. <sup>7</sup>Department of Journalism and Technical Communication, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO 80523, USA. <sup>8</sup>Department of Journalism and Communication, Lehigh University, Bethlehem, PA 18015, USA. <sup>9</sup>Associate Professor Emeritus, School of Journalism, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN 47405, USA. <sup>10</sup>Department of Communication, George Mason University, Fairfax, VA 22030–4444, USA. <sup>11</sup>School of Communication, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI 49008, USA.

\*To whom correspondence should be addressed. E-mail: valentijm@yahoo.com

### References and Notes

1. AAAS, "Statement by the AAAS board of directors on labeling of genetically modified foods, 20 October 2012" ([www.aaas.org/news/releases/2012/media/AAAS\\_GM\\_statement.pdf](http://www.aaas.org/news/releases/2012/media/AAAS_GM_statement.pdf)).
2. "California fails to pass genetically modified foods labeling initiative" *Time*, 7 November 2012 (<http://healthland.time.com/2012/11/07/california-fails-to-pass-gm-foods-labeling-initiative/>).
3. The authors are members of, but do not write on behalf of, AAAS Fellows, Section Y (General Interest in Science and Engineering).