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USA: California rejects mandatory GMO labelling

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by Dr. John Paull



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The voters of California have rejected the proposal to label GMO food. The proposition was narrowly lost, 47% to 53% (4,326,770 'Yes' votes vs. 4,884,961 'No' votes). Proposition 47 was supported by the organic sector and opposed by a coalition of GMO companies together with US multinational food companies.

Californians were invited to vote into law 'The California Right to Know Genetically Engineered Food Act'. Section 1(a) declared that "California consumers have the right to know whether the foods they purchase were produced using genetic engineering".

Section 1 (e) of the proposed Act perhaps tempted fate by declaring that "Polls consistently show that more than 90 percent of the public want to know if their food was produced using genetic engineering".

Voters were advised that "The purpose of this measure is to create and enforce the fundamental right of the people of California to be fully informed about whether the food they purchase and eat is genetically engineered and not misbranded as natural so that they can choose for themselves whether to purchase and eat such foods".

US\$45 million was spent on advertising to urge voters to reject the proposition compared to US\$8 million in support. The biggest donor for the proposition was the Organic Consumers Fund (\$1.3 million). The no campaign was spearheaded by GMO companies Monsanto, Dupont, BASF, Bayer, Dow, and Syngenta. These chemical companies were joined by US multinational food and beverage companies including Pepsi, Kraft, Nestle,

Coca-Cola, Kellogg, Campbell Soup, Hershey, Heinz, Mars, Unilever, Sara Lee and McCain. Monsanto was the lead contributor (\$8.1 million). The rejection of Proposition 47 will be a bitter blow to the organic sector and, as the status quo prevails, a cause for celebration by the GMO industry.