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Knowing What's in the Food We Eat

To the Editor:

The controversy over labeling foods containing genetically engineered ingredients reflects the public's nervousness about a technology that may sound scary, but that offers significant benefits. Genetically engineered crops have reduced the use of some environmentally harmful pesticides and increased farmer income. Soon, they may provide consumers with nutritional benefits, such as heart-healthy oils.

While a strong international scientific consensus considers current engineered crops safe to eat, consumer confidence would increase if Congress required the Food and Drug Administration to review the safety of engineered crops before they were marketed, as Senator Richard J. Durbin once proposed.

Currently, companies voluntarily send summary safety data to the F.D.A. for a cursory review. An affirmative safety decision by the F.D.A. would lessen the fears many consumers have about eating those products and eliminate one concern of labeling advocates.

GREGORY JAFFE

Director, Biotechnology Project Center for Science in the Public Interest Washington, March 15, 2013