

Green Party of St. Louis/Gateway Green Alliance

P.O. Box 8094, St. Louis MO 63156

314-727-8554 E-mail: fitzdon@aol.com www.gateway-greens.org

For immediate release: March 6, 2006

Contacts: Daniel [digger] Romano, 314-771-8576; Don Fitz, 314-727-8554

LAWS COULD PROHIBIT LABELING FOOD WITH HUMAN GENES

March 6, 2006. St. Louis, Missouri. On March 8, 2006, the Missouri Senate and US House will consider legislation that would take away the right of municipalities and counties to restrict or require labeling of food with human genes. In Missouri, SB 1009, known as the "Seed Bill," is scheduled for a hearing at noon on Wednesday, March 8. Sponsored by David Klindt, the bill eliminates the right of Missouri counties and municipalities to regulate the labeling, sale or use of seeds.

The US House of Representatives had planned to rush through related legislation on March 2; but the debate was delayed until March 8, the same day the Missouri bill will be heard. Called the "National Uniformity for Food Act," H.R. 4167 would overturn state food labeling laws, hamstringing state food safety officers, and increase consumer exposure to food-borne illnesses.

The Green Party of St. Louis urges Missouri officials to oppose both bills. "States often pass food regulation laws which the federal government then copies," says Daniel [digger] Romano, who was the 2002 Missouri Green Party candidate for the US Senate. "California pioneered laws regarding labels on alcohol relating to dangers to pregnant women and the federal government followed suit. H.R. 4167 would prevent this from happening."

"It would also get in the way of passing state legislation which spells out how to control food," Romano added. "Since 80% of food safety enforcement is done by state and local officials, H.R. 4167 could be a public health disaster."

Barbara Chicherio, Co-coordinator for the Green Party of St. Louis, wants local governments to have the right to label genetically engineered seeds. She says, "Farmers should have the right to know what they are planting and we should have the right to know what we are eating. It's about democracy as much as it's about food contamination. This legislation is part of a coordinated effort by the agribusiness industry to eliminate people's right to know they are eating genetically engineered food. They want the legislation because they know people would not eat that food if they had a choice."

"This is particularly serious because of what happened with Ventria Bioscience," says Don Fitz, spokesperson on toxins for the Green Party of St. Louis. In 2005, Ventria proposed to plant 204.5 acres of rice engineered with human genes to produce the proteins lactoferrin and lyzosome which it claimed would go into medicines.

According to Fitz, "It would have been planted in the boot heel, Missouri's prime rice-growing region. Neighboring farmers raised a storm because they knew that Ventria's genetically engineered rice could cross-pollinate their fields and their purchasers might not want to munch on Grandpa's genes in their rice puffs." But the deal fell through after Anheuser-Busch announced that it would not buy Missouri rice if it could have come from genetically engineered pollen.

"The Ventria saga raises the question of whether the greed of US agribusiness to strip away local rights could end up destroying small farmers," suggests Mr. Romano. "If no one can figure out what is in US food, it will be hard to sell it to Europeans and others who have said over and over that they do not want genetically contaminated food."

SB 1009 reads: "Except as otherwise specifically provided in sections 266.011 to 266.111, no ordinance or regulation of any political subdivision may prohibit or in any way attempt to regulate any matter relating to the registration, labeling, sale, storage, transportation, processing, distribution, notification of use, use, or planting of seeds and other propagules."