

COMMENTARY

Thursday, October 24, 2002

Editorial

Mandating gene-spliced food labels a fair measure

We heartily endorse Measure 27. It is only fair that the people know what they are eating — especially if it contains genetically engineered products.

The problems, or lack thereof, with genetically engineered foods are not yet known; hence the problem. While scientists for the British Department of Health have determined in short-term studies that some of the more extreme scenarios carry little risk, there are other worries about allergic reactions and whether certain GE foods may affect the body differently than non-GE food would.

For instance, what if genes from a nut were placed in corn? Could it affect those who could have potentially deadly reactions to nuts? There haven't been enough studies, and all the possible combinations of plant genes that could be used in GE food make a comprehensive study daunting, if not impossible.

Further, there are environmental implications that farmers may not foresee when they plant GE crops. Some research suggests that the natural pesticides created by some GE plants are indiscriminately harmful and will kill species outside of the few that prey on that crop.

There is also concern that GE plants and weeds will intermingle, and that genes that make the crop more hardy will be transferred to the weeds, causing some agricultural havoc.

Given these potential risks, it seems sensible to label the unknown quantity for consumers. People tend to get rightfully indignant when they're used as an unwitting test subject.

The opponents of Measure 27 point to an immense cost in keeping records to show that all the foods used their product are GE-free if they want to avoid the label. They would like us to forget that they've had to do a very similar process for almost 100 years. Labeling of foods is neither a risky scheme nor anything new.

People may not realize that ingredient labeling has been required for a number of different reasons since the early 20th century. First, the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906, enacted in the wake of Upton Sinclair's "The Jungle," ordered that all ingredients had to be listed on the food's packaging, and that there had to be proof that the foods were not adulterated. This proof usually consists of diligent record-keeping by the manufacturers or producers.

Further, products have had labels for other purposes for quite a long time. For decades, most companies — even ones that don't produce foods — have actively sought Jewish kosher certification for their foods and kitchen products, and since the 1990s, all foods have been required to have standardized nutritional info on their packaging. Now, the FDA is allowing those manufacturers who can prove that their food is totally organic to put a label attesting to the fact.

Measure 27 is a reasonable plan. If it passes, we have only one suggestion: The measure should offer a scale telling what percentage of the food is genetically engineered.

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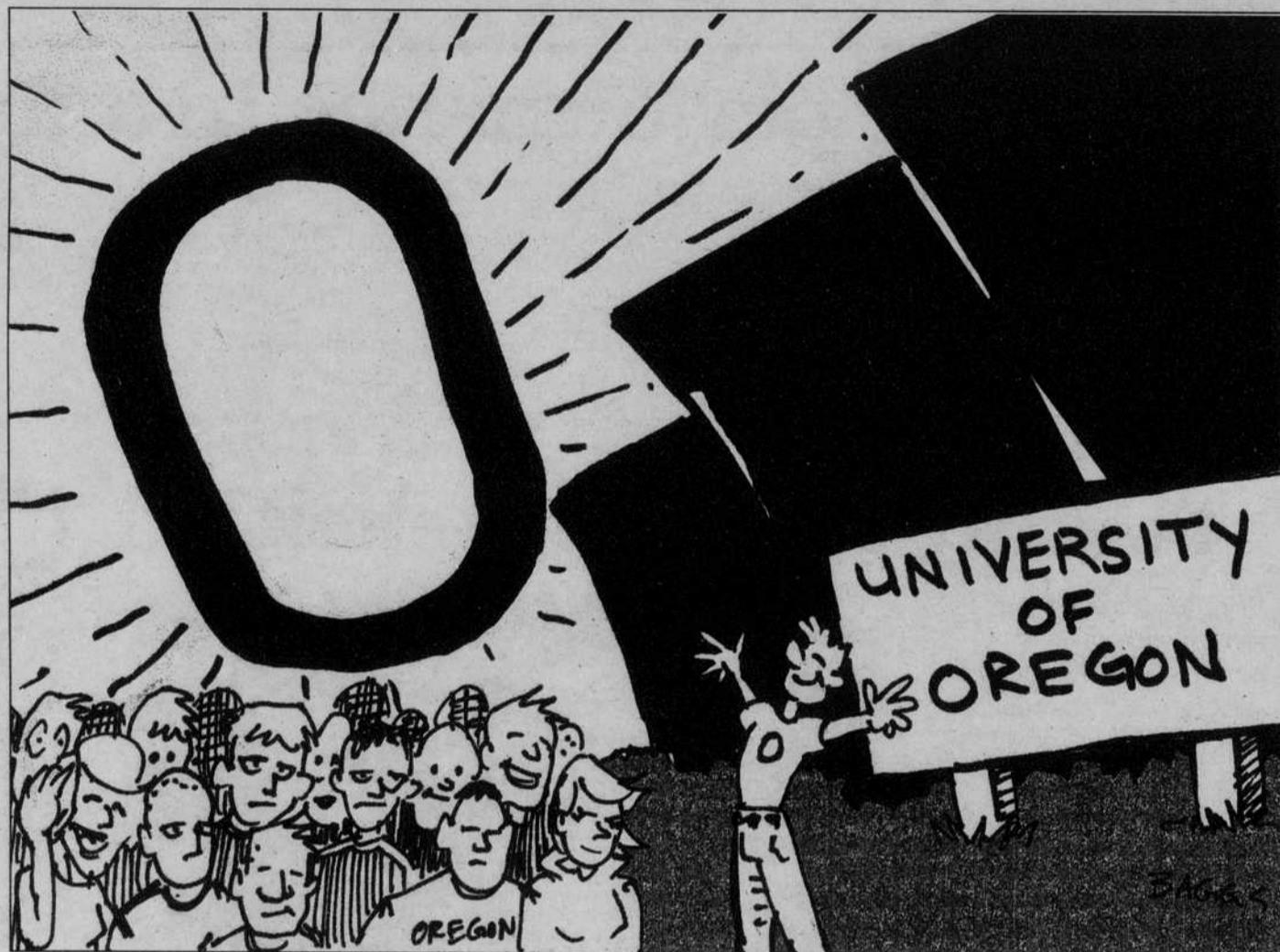
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MORE than a NUMBER

Opportunities come and go, and decisions need to be made. But rarely are we sure of such decisions and know they are the right ones.

I spent my freshman year of college last year at a small private school next door: Northwest Christian College. NCC is small — and I mean small: The undergraduate population is only 360 students. Everyone seemingly knew everyone else, and that made things all right.

With its affiliation with the Christian Church, this school commended itself on the fact that students were able to become more than just a number — a plus for those who'd feel "lost in the crowd" at larger colleges and universities. And it was true: At NCC, one could build strong relationships with many students, and even staff members knew their students on a first name basis.

In my time at NCC, I never once felt like "just a number"; the school did well on that. And, in fact, I think it was the

best experience I have ever had. I met so many people and built so many strong friendships, many to last a lifetime. But most importantly, I found myself.

I grew so much in that year and discovered a lot about myself that I may not have otherwise known. This made my decision to transfer to the University of Oregon one of the toughest I have had to make. However, although NCC had been so good to me, it was time I moved on.

Little did I know at the time this decision was just what I needed.

Transferring to good 'ol Mighty "O" was undoubtedly the best decision I have ever made. And why wouldn't it have been? This is to me, one of the greatest schools in the country. The Princeton Review agrees in its "Best 345 Colleges: Smart Student's Guide to College."

According to the guide, the University excels in academ-

ics, among other things, with programs of study in areas such as journalism, business, law and architecture.

Also according to the Review, while "generally, students aren't religious, and dorms are like dungeons," the school also provides a community that is pleasing for nearly everyone. People of any lifestyle can find a little piece to call their own, whether it is just hitting a local party or joining one of the many social and political groups around the campus.

But it doesn't just stop at the edge of campus. The students here are some of the most aware out there, making this one of the most politically active colleges in the nation, at least according to "The Unofficial, Biased, Insiders Guide to the Most Interesting Colleges."

Although most students tend to be on the left side of the spectrum, all political views tend to be heard. In fact, I noticed it is hard to even walk to class without getting a daily

dose of politics.

With more than 17,000 undergraduates, the size of this campus population far outstrips NCC. But even with so many students here, I don't necessarily feel lost in the crowd, or even caught up in the shuffle of things. Rather, I find that I can be myself and, bit by bit, learn to be more independent and to function on my own.

Sometimes, it is good to be just a number. I am one of 17,000, now a number speaking to the numbers. My voice can now make an impact to such a strong and growing student body.

Today, I know that the decision I made to come here was the right one. And I am proud to be a Duck.

Contact the columnist at sarahspellman@dailyemerald.com. Her views do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

Letter to the editor

Kulongoski for governor

As a student at the University, I believe that Oregonians should elect Ted Kulongoski as their next governor.

The budget crisis currently facing our state Legislature threatens to deny Oregon students the quality education that is po-

tentially available to them. Our state is full of caring and talented teachers as well as students who will someday live up to the investment that Oregon citizens should be making in them.

Kulongoski supports sustainable and long-term funding solutions for Oregon schools. In addition to his plan to free \$80 million from administration and put it into Oregon's classrooms, he recognizes that it is the job of caring and truly patriotic citizens to support state programs and educa-

tion. Kulongoski has repeatedly shown his dedication to serving the needs of all members of our communities, including youth.

For these reasons, Kulongoski is endorsed in his bid for governor by Oregon teacher groups and has earned the votes of students. A vote for Kulongoski this November is a vote for the future of Oregon and its children.

Meagan MacLennan
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