

# OPINION

## The Right to Know How Our Food is Produced

Shouldn't have to eat in the dark

BY JILL RICHARDSON



I'm sick of writing about labeling genetically engineered foods.

I'm sick of it because there's really one thing to say, and I've said it before:

Americans have a right to know how their food is produced. Period.

The fact is that most processed food in the supermarket is genetically engineered. That means it includes ingredients that have genes from other species inserted in their DNA. Nearly every single American has eaten genetically engineered foods, but many of us don't know it.

Does it matter? That's up to each individual.

Just like it's up to you whether you care if your food is kosher, gluten-free, low-carb, or anything else. You can decide whether it's

worth it to you to buy cage-free eggs or not, because the eggs are labeled. That doesn't take freedom away from someone else who wishes to make a different choice than you.

The labeling fight is an old one. Food companies don't want to add any label that might make you less likely to buy their products.

For example, they don't want to add easy-to-read "traffic light" labels that give each product a health rating of green ("Yes! Eat this!"), yellow ("Think before you eat"), or red ("This is really bad for you"). In studies, consumers find these labels really easy to use — so naturally businesses that sell junk food hate them.

On the flipside, food companies do want to add labels that make their products look more attractive — even if the labels are misleading. Like the time orange juice from concentrate was mislabeled as "fresh." Or when Chee-

rios promised to lower your cholesterol, even though the claim was unproven.

Sometimes, food manufacturers even make up voluntary labeling systems to show consumers which of their foods are healthiest, like the corporate-backed Smart Choices Program that labeled sugary Froot Loops a "smart choice." When pressed, they defended the claim by noting that Froot Loops cereal is healthier than, say, a donut.

The pushback against labeling genetically engineered foods is simply an admission by manufacturers that we wouldn't want to eat their food if we knew what they were putting in it.

You know what, then? Maybe don't put it in the food.

But, they tell us, genetically engineered ingredients are safe.

OK, fine. Put them in the food and label it. And if you're afraid consumers won't buy it, make your case to the American people why we should eat it. Because Americans shouldn't have to eat

in the dark. In the land of the free, we ought to have the freedom to decide what to put in our mouths.

Speaking of eating in the dark, Congress is on the brink of passing legislation that its critics call the "DARK" Act. That stands for Deny Americans the Right to Know, and that's exactly what this kind of law would do.

It's a common game in food politics: When individual states finally do what the federal government won't — as Vermont recently did by requiring labels — industry opponents go to Congress to ban the regulations everywhere.

The tactic is completely undemocratic.

Whatever you think about genetically engineered foods, Big Food is proving again and again that its politics may be its most unappetizing product of all.

*OtherWords* columnist Jill Richardson is the author of *Recipe for America: Why Our Food System Is Broken and What We Can Do to Fix It*.

## Celebrating Six Years of the Affordable Care Act

Obama Cares narrows the disparities gap

BY MARC H. MORIAL



On March 23, 2010, President Barack Obama signed the Affordable Health Care Act into law in the East Room of the White House.

Six years later, 20 million people who could not afford health insurance or were deprived of life-saving coverage because of a pre-existing condition, now have health insurance coverage. Today, our nation is actively narrowing the gap on adverse racial health care disparities.

Today, under the law simultaneously loved and reviled as "Obamacare," most insurance plans fully cover preventative health care services; young adults, who might have otherwise been uninsured, get to stay on their parents' health insurance plans until age 26; and women are no longer forced to pay more for health insurance because of their gender.

And that is why I am adding my voice to the legion of American voices congratulating the current administration on its signature health care law as well as those

calling for the necessary reforms to fix the law's shortcomings and ensure that this generation and future generations of Americans experience health care as a right, not an exclusive and elusive privilege.

From sea to shining sea, health insurance coverage gains have been shared broadly among American communities. African Americans have the highest mortality rate of any racial and ethnic group for cancer and Latino communities also suffer from disproportionate rates of illness, like cervical cancer, according to the Department of Health and Human Services.

Since the law's hard-fought inception, the number of uninsureds among African Americans—and whites—has dropped by over 50 percent. The Hispanic rate of uninsured has decreased by a quarter, with almost four million Hispanic adults gaining coverage under the law. Over two million young adults, who were particularly likely to be uninsured after losing coverage under their parent's health insurance, are now guaranteed insurance under their parent's health plans until they are 26 years old.

Despite all of these gains, Republicans have continued to label the Affordable Care Act a disaster. How can 20 more million Americans with access to life-saving

health care ever be described as a disaster?

Yet, the Republicans have been engaged in a five-year long effort to repeal the Affordable Care Act. The GOP has busied itself taking over 50 votes to roll back the law and put the health of millions of Americans at risk, but has never leveled with the American people about a GOP alternative to the Affordable Care Act.

Rather than take a position of slash and burn, we need to save what works and better what doesn't.

The Affordable Care Act is not the first large-scale government program to face its share of challenges or wide-spread criticism. Obamacare shares company with the Social Security Act, which was

described by a critic as a "fraud on the working man," and Medicare was widely seen as a threat to American freedom. Despite the heated rhetoric, both programs are still here serving the needs of Americans.

The Affordable Care Act is in its sixth year of infancy—and while the program is no where near perfect—it is saving lives and putting an end to insurance practices that unfairly deny Americans insurance coverage. Obamacare has a long, bumpy road of reforms to travel, but in year six, it has also come a long way in providing better health choices for the American people.

*Marc H. Morial is president and chief executive officer of the National Urban League.*

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