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Senator Ross, Representative Plucker, and esteemed members of the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry. I am here today to present LD 1257 *"An Act Regarding Labeling of Genetically Engineered Food Products"*

Thank you for this opportunity to discuss the topic of GMO labeling. I am bringing forward this issue as it has been many years since Maine has addressed this at the legislative level. Since that time, there have been many advances in the bioengineering of food products. "Bioengineered" is the descriptive used for what most consumers know to be genetically modified organisms or more well known as GMO. The National Bioengineered Food Disclosure Standard defines bioengineered foods as "those that contain detectable genetic material that has been modified through certain lab techniques and cannot be created through conventional breeding or found in nature," according to the USDA website.

Many people are becoming increasingly concerned about the safety of our food supply. Unfortunately, when it comes to our food supply, we bow to unelected bureaucrats within financially captured government agencies. We are not doing the "will of the people" as we were elected to do. Instead, what we are telling the people of Maine is that we, in fact, have no voice and neither do they. We are telling them that they do not have the right to know what is in their food or how it is made or produced. . When our food supply is genetically modified, the FDA or USDA decides if this is information that we should have access to. How many recalls has the FDA had? How many fines have been issued for shady research given by companies in which the FDA has approved their products and then issued recalls for those same products. Food and pharmaceutical companies are now combining their efforts and influence as they do not have specify all ingredients as proprietary information is protected, even though labeling can now be done with a QR

code and limited packaging. This is not a science fiction movie. This is the tampering with of our food supply with real world consequences. Yet, we do not know and are not allowed to question if there are any consequences.

We passed a law, as a state, that we wanted GMO foods to be identified, now identified as genetically engineered. In 2013, LD 713 was enacted that required the Commissioner of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry to monitor legislative activities in other states and certify to the Secretary of State and the Revisor of Statutes when legislation requiring mandatory labeling of genetically engineered food has been adopted by at least 5 contiguous states including Maine. It tasks the Commissioner to notify the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over agriculture, conservation and forestry matters when certification is made. (Maine Revised Statutes, Title 22, chapter 565 takes effect 30 days after the date of the commissioner's certification. This law was to be repealed if no certification has been made by the Commissioner of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry under subsection 1 before January 1, 2018, this Act is repealed on that date.)

As more states began to pass legislation concerning this issue, the federal government usurped the authority of individual states in 2016 and put forward their own regulations in 2020 stripping away the labeling requirements that were passed into state law. The Food and Drug Administration is the department that has been tasked with this oversight. I am disappointed that we have not made a stronger stand in this area of food sovereignty that affects all the people of Maine.

Much has changed since that law was passed and was then usurped by the federal government. Should cloned animals and their offspring be allowed in our food supply? What about cloned or cultured meat grown in vats? Cell-based chicken was approved in Singapore in 2020 and has since been available for purchase in restaurants in that country. Do you have a right to know what you are eating at a restaurant? For many products, the country of origin labeling requirement has been repealed and you are not given the right to know what country your beef or pork products are from and what their standards are. It is no longer just DNA manipulation of products. What about mRNA vaccines in food? I can't even believe these conversations are being had on the world stage and are actually gaining approval by agencies that are comprised of non-elected representatives of the people affected by these decisions. We, as consumers, no longer have the right to demand notification of what types of products our future food supply

may consist of. Instead, it is decided by those who have the incentive of great financial gain.

The FDA has been shown to not have the consumers' best interest to be their top priority as evidenced by the amount of harm or damage required before recalls or penalties are issued. Also, large corporations or companies are merely given fines and are then allowed to continue to self-monitor any new products they put out.

When we look at the amount of farmland being purchased by foreign countries and other financially over-powering entities, our small, local farms are becoming more vulnerable to hostile takeovers as large agricultural conglomerates price them out. The FARM—Foreign Adversary Risk Management—Act, introduced in the House of Representatives and the Senate on January 25, 2023 provides recognition that there were concerns on the federal level surrounding this issue. Like wealth, land ownership is becoming concentrated into fewer and fewer hands, resulting in a greater push for monocultures and more intensive industrial farming techniques to generate greater returns. One percent of the world's farms control 70% of the world's farmlands, one report found.

Now that the idea of biopharmaceutical manipulation of food and nanotechnology have been discussed on the world stage by those with extreme financial and political influence, I thought it prudent to have a conversation to ask questions surrounding this issue and to discern if we, as a state, have any concerns.

As a nurse, I have always believed in transparency and full-disclosure. I believe patients always have the right to know the risks surrounding medications, treatments, and procedures so they may decide for themselves what they deem to be an appropriate course of action. As a legislator, I believe my constituents and the people of Maine have the right to know what is in their food products and if they have been manipulated. When I have had discussions surrounding this issue, I inform people to assume, overall, that their food products may contain bioengineered ingredients unless stated otherwise. This brings me to my other concern. I seek to ensure that protections are provided to our small, local growers with the federal government's takeover in this area.

It amazes me how California can pass PROP 65 and have products labeled as carcinogenic, but when too many states vote to know what is in their food, they must be stopped. I believe that the testimony that MOFGA presented at the last hearing was very informative and I am glad to have it as part of the public record to illustrate the

underhanded way that our own law was hijacked by the federal government. We, as a state, defied federal immigration law and allowed illegal aliens within our borders. We, as a state, defied federal drug laws when allowing the cannabis trade within our borders. We pick and choose which federal mandates or laws we will follow.

I believe the discussion is warranted and that we will address this on behalf of Maine citizens.The manipulation of our food supply is something that should stay in our conversation and not be dismissed to the federal government never to be spoken of again. Sometimes being pro-active instead of reactive better prepares us for evolving situations. This is my attempt in that endeavor. I leave it to the committee in how to proceed, but I offer the following starting points:

Recommend that notification is given for any legislation or decisions the federal regulators announce concerning this topic.

Recommend that if biopharmaceuticals are introduced and patented that an assessment would come into play to revisit this issue if possible.

Recommend a letter to the federal delegation stating our questions and/or concerns, if any are noted.

I do understand your time is valuable and truly appreciate your consideration on this topic. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you.

Tracy L Quint

Tracy L. Quint
State Representative