

A Strategy Built on Nervous Moms

Fearmongers seek to block technology that could feed multitudes

By Julie Gunlock

Summary: *In a very real sense, genetically modified food has existed for millennia. Recent scientific advances in the field are decreasing starvation, helping the world's poor, and lowering food costs at your neighborhood grocery store. Unable to counter these advances for mankind, environmental activists have taken to scaring mothers that such food will poison their children, in the hope that nervous moms will pressure government to suppress "frankenfood," even in the absence of any scientific evidence that it is harmful.*

In politics, fear is a powerful weapon. Throughout human history, politicians and activists have exploited fear—fear of people who come from other places or who look different from oneself, fear of other religions or systems of belief, and, as in the case of genetically modified foods, fear of changing technology.

It's believed that workers in the Netherlands expressed their opposition to new textile loom technology by throwing their wooden shoes (*sabots*) into machinery, becoming the original *saboteurs*. Early in the Industrial Revolution, workers calling themselves Luddites formed anti-tech organizations such as the League of the Just, which evolved into the Communist Party. Anxiety about the effect of new technology has been reflected in works ranging from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) to the Charlie Chaplin movie *Modern Times* (1936), which inspired the famous "Lucy in the chocolate factory" bit from TV's *I Love Lucy* in 1952, through the '50s and '60s, when radiation could, it was imagined, turn ants into giant man-eaters or change a scientist into the Incredible Hulk, and on to the present day.



Images from the campaign to frighten moms about Genetically Modified foods.

Americans today seem particularly vulnerable to the effects of technophobia. We have become a nation of nervous wrecks. In spite of empirical data showing people's lives are improving generally, Americans have become increasingly worried about almost everything. And playing off the general sense of anxiety—scaremongering—is a key strategy of people who oppose the idea of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in the U.S. food supply.

GMOs are organisms such as plants and animals that have been altered using modern techniques that involve changing the DNA "blueprint" of an organism. Anti-GMO activists often use the term "frankenfood" to evoke Shelley's terrifying gothic tale about a monster created in a laboratory. The likening of frankenfood to Frankenstein's monster helps promote two myths about biotech crops: that genetically modified (GM) food is grotesque, abnormal, and unhealthy; and that our

reckless tinkering with the natural world through GM will come at a high cost to human life.

This anti-GMO message is aimed at the public in general, but aimed in particular at a segment of the public: mothers worried about their children.

Target: Mom

Anti-GMO activists have enlisted a vast network of female writers and "mommy bloggers" who are persuasive, have acquired credibility on child-nutrition issues, maintain a loyal and trusting audi-

March 2014

A Nervous Mom Strategy
Page 1

Green Notes
Page 8

ence, and provide a girlfriend-y tone that is hard to caricature or dismiss. (A blog is a web log, an information/discussion website that is updated frequently; a mommy blogger is a blog writer who focuses on homemaking or parenting.)

The mothers-against-GMOs writers—anti-GMO mommy bloggers and other anti-GMO writers who have a mostly female readership—have become a powerful force promoting the myth that GMOs are dangerous. The solution, they suggest, is to ban or heavily restrict the use of GMOs, and as an interim measure, they want all levels of government to institute more stringent labeling requirements for foods with GMO ingredients.

The problem is that they present only one, distorted side of the story. Moms deserve better than propaganda. They deserve to know the truth about GMOs and the promise of biotechnology. They deserve to know that thousands of studies have been conducted on the safety of GMOs and that each has come to the same conclusion: GMOs are safe for human and animal consumption. Women should also know the high costs associated with regulating or banning GMOs and with onerous labeling requirements, all of which will drive food costs higher and bankrupt many small food companies.

The food and biotech industries must do a better job of explaining the complex issue of genetic modification to women, who hold the purse strings of the American

Editor: Steven J. Allen

Publisher: Terrence Scanlon

Address: 1513 16th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20036-1480

Phone: (202) 483-6900

E-mail: sallen@CapitalResearch.org

Website: CapitalResearch.org

Green Watch is published by Capital Research Center, a non-partisan education and research organization classified by the IRS as a 501(c)(3) public charity. Reprints are available for \$2.50 prepaid to Capital Research Center.

economy. But women have a responsibility to seek out legitimate scientific studies and sources of information, and they must recognize that while mommy blogs are a wonderful source of information on many topics, they can also promote misinformation (or disinformation, information that is deliberately misleading) and they can be, and are, used to generate unfounded anxiety.

The puzzling dichotomy: Fear in a safer world

It's an odd phenomenon in America today: By most measures, people's safety is improving, yet the level of worry among women is increasing. A 2013 poll conducted by the Independent Women's Forum reveals women's gloomy outlook. Of the women polled, 68% said they believed the United States is becoming more dangerous. The majority of respondents across all age, ethnic, and ideological lines reported feeling frustrated at the lack of trustworthy sources for health information, and most held a deep distrust of the news media. A clear majority of respondents (4 out of 5) agreed the media are more interested in ratings than in accurately reporting health and safety news. A whopping 83% of women admitted finding it difficult to discern between (a) legitimate warnings of risks to actual well-being, and (b) scary headlines designed to attract attention.

This makes sense. Alarmism is a money maker for news outlets, which is why women are bombarded with headlines that scream *danger, danger!* The news media hype findings from dubious, scientifically questionable studies, and in the process often make women feel confused, overwhelmed, and no better informed than before.

Consider just a few facts that rarely get reported:

► Americans born today can expect to live well into their late 70s, and projected life expectancy continues to increase. In the U.S., life expectancy at birth has increased by two decades since the 1930s. When the Social Security program was debated in the 1930s, the average 65-year-old woman was expected to live about 14

years; today, it's 20 years. The maternal death rate from childbirth fell in the U.S. by some 99% over the course of the 20th Century.

► Two centuries of vaccine development have eradicated, in the developed world, some of the most common infectious diseases that plagued humans worldwide for thousands of years. Smallpox, which killed an estimated 300-500 million people in the 20th Century, no longer exists in the wild. Rinderpest has been eradicated, and current programs target polio, yaws, and guinea worm disease for elimination. It's believed other diseases such as measles, mumps, and rubella can be made extinct with current technology.

► Cancer and heart disease rates continue to decline in the United States. Crime is down worldwide, and according to the World Bank, the number of people living on less than \$1.25 per day has been cut in half since 1981. The U.N. reports world hunger has decreased nearly 10 percent since the early 1990s.

The reality in the good ol' days was that life was, in the words of Thomas Hobbes, "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." Yet when the entertainment media show us the past, they present a glamorized, cleaned-up version. We lack the capacity to imagine life as bad as it really was. As a result, we do not appreciate fully the improvements new technology has made in human life. We tend to see the dangers, not the benefits, of technology. Is it any wonder many women are suspicious of progress and of innovations like GMOs?

Anti-GMO activists tap into women's fear

Anti-GMO activists have a clear understanding of women's increasing anxiety and work hard to cultivate the impression they are on a mission to protect women and children from the dangers of the world, which include the use of GMOs in the American food supply. They take advantage of nervous moms by suggesting GMOs are dangerous, while keeping all that complicated science talk to a minimum. But moms deserve to know the truth, that more than a thousand

studies (including hundreds that were independently funded) certify the safety of GM food. Every major regulatory and oversight agency around the world agrees that GMOs pose no harm to humans or animals.

A common theme of the anti-GMO activists is that GMOs are banned in Europe. They fail to mention that these bans were put in place because of political pressure, not scientific evidence. The United Nations-sponsored World Health Organization finds GMOs to be safe, as do the European Commission, the French Academy of Science, and Union of German Academics and Scientists. Yet politicians in Europe have ignored these certifications, bowing to environmental interests.

Anti-GMO activists also tell moms that GMOs have only recently entered the American food supply. In fact, Americans have consumed GMOs for 20 years. Today, GM crops are used in animal feed (mostly corn) and are present in roughly 80% of processed foods. Given their predominance in the American diet, if they were indeed harmful, any deleterious effects would almost certainly have been seen by now. No such effects have been seen.

Naturally, anti-GMO activists deny this impressive safety record, choosing instead to claim, without a shred of scientific evidence, that GMOs are responsible for a range of medical conditions, from food allergies and obesity to neurological and sexual disorders and cancer. Activists point to supposed studies that make these connections, but those studies fall into two categories: (1) Those that cannot be replicated and are therefore not considered legitimate scientific studies that add to the overall understanding of the issue, and (2) false studies created by activists who want to advance the anti-GMO argument.

It's a frustrating reality for scientists and researchers in the biotech field that they must accept that a large part of their career will be spent playing whack-a-mole in an effort to refute those junk-science studies that continue to pop up. Activists' continu-

ing promotion of flawed, debunked, and widely dismissed studies is one of the reasons the myth of GMO harm persists. These flawed or fake studies are effective tools used to scare moms, who make most of their families' purchasing decisions.

The mommy-ification of the anti-GMO activist

Women's lives have changed substantially in the past 60 years. In 1950, just one-third of women over age 16 were employed. Today, roughly six in ten women work outside of the home. In 1970, married women brought in an average of 27 percent of the household income, compared to 37 percent today. Women are also outpacing men educationally and are increasingly filling jobs that require higher levels of education. In recent years, women's unemployment rate has been lower than men's. While women were always important consumers in the American economy, today women's purchasing power has increased. Women pay the most attention to consumer alerts and the ubiquitous health warnings in the mainstream media.

Anti-GMO activists know that if you want to change the way people shop, you must target women in your marketing efforts.

They also know many women feel tremendous pressure and experience feelings of guilt as they juggle their roles as wives, mothers, and professionals. Many books have been dedicated to topics like women's work-life balance, "having it all," and how to be a "present" parent in a world increasingly filled with distractions and pressures.

Activists take advantage of women's special concerns. They know women are busy, sometimes overwhelmed, and often confused by the sheer volume of health warnings out there. They know that by planting a seed of doubt in the minds of these mothers, they can scare women into shopping the way they want them to shop.

When environmentalists try to reach women with a direct message, they often come across as too severe, too obsessed with their cause, too devoted to single-issue thinking. Most busy moms don't

have the time to manage a household, care for their kids, make dinner, do the laundry, and save the planet all at the same time. And many of the prescriptions offered by environmentalists are simply too expensive for mothers on a tight budget. Not everyone can afford to shop at, say, Whole Foods.

Sure, some moms are committed to driving out of their way each week to spend hundreds of extra dollars at the Amish country market purchasing farm fresh eggs, raw milk, and organic produce. But most moms have neither the inclination nor the income to follow that path.

On the other hand, if you suggest to them that the food they're feeding their children is dangerous and could lead to all sorts of terrifying diseases, you can get their attention, alter their shopping and eating habits, and drive them to demand government action.

In a 2013 interview, organic food promoter and anti-GMO activist Jeffrey Smith explained the importance of moms to the anti-GMO movement: "Moms are the shoppers, and the shoppers will turn this around. And moms protect children. They may not be motivated to change their diet to protect themselves, but when they realize the potential damage to their children, most moms become what I call Tiger moms. They'll do what's necessary to protect their children, and this force of nature will win out."

Anti-GMO activists understand that to attract moms, they must change both their message (replace "save the planet" with "save the kid") and also their tone. They must replace the stereotypical smug, sanctimonious environmentalist, droning on about renewable energy credits, with a different type of spokesman. Today, the most effective anti-GMO messengers are fellow moms who gently advise their peers that, yes, they've been harming their kids, but they can change. These mom-messengers communicate with a softer tone, invoking love and understanding, compassion, soothing reassurance and encouraging pep talks.

The Food Babe

Take for example a well-known mommy blogger and food activist who calls herself the “Food Babe.” Featured on *Good Morning America*, CNN, and *The Dr. Oz Show*, and in the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, and other publications, the Food Babe is a model spokesman and media darling. She’s young, beautiful, and convincing. She smiles as she delivers the news that you’re killing your children. She’s crafted a smart approach to other moms. Instead of scolding them, the Food Babe shifts the blame to the food industry, an industry that, she says, is tricking gullible moms with slick packaging, high-priced marketing strategies, and plain old lies.

The Food Babe’s popular website is filled with the standard alarmist language. On one page, she asks, “are you eating this ingredient that’s banned all over the world?” and wonders, “are there harmful ingredients lurking in your spice cabinet?” One story is ominously titled “What is Trader Joe’s Hiding?” She also claims food companies “duped” her and explains how “cereal is exploiting Americans.”

The Food Babe is a social media pro, making use of slick videos showing her doing her best Erin Brockovich impersonation of the struggling women (if by “struggling,” the Food Babe means women who get to sit in their plush and expertly decorated home offices complete with modern art prints and a 52-inch flat screen television on the walls while busily typing away on a Mac laptop) as she sticks it to the big bad corporation.

The health and organic food website Mercola.com described her this way:

Vani Hari, better known as “Food Babe,” is a blogger and food activist in Charlotte, North Carolina. Her blog, FoodBabe.com, and her “leading by example” style of activism is an inspiration to a growing number of people not just in the U.S. but around the world.

One of her most celebrated achievements is her participation in the Democratic National Convention, in

which she drew massive media attention by standing up with a makeshift “Label GMOs” sign in the front row, during Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack’s speech.

This interview was taped a week after the March Against Monsanto where I participated in one of the local marches and had a chance to witness first-hand people working in the activist movement. It really helped me understand that there’s a widespread opportunity for virtually anyone to participate, get inspired, and to really make a difference.

She was quoted by Mercola describing how she was duped by the food industry, tricked into eating food filled with toxins. After majoring in computer science and entering “the rat race”—

I got picked up by one of the top consulting firms in the country . . . managing large-scale projects, mergers, acquisitions, and integration work. I was travelling Sunday through Thursday, and quickly, at the age of 22 to 23 years old, I became really sick . . .

It was that life-changing moment that I realized, ‘Wait a minute, I gained 25 to 30 pounds within a three-month period, and then I had appendicitis?’ There’s something seriously wrong with what I’ve been doing and what I’ve been eating. What’s in the food, and what caused my body to be so out of whack?

Everyone says appendicitis is this random occurrence . . . But I don’t think it’s random, because it’s definitely related to your digestive system. And I was overloading my digestive system with tons of toxins.

A recent video by the Food Babe shows her challenging a food company (actually, she’s badgering an unwitting customer-service representative) for using the label “all natural” on its packaging. In the blog accompanying the video, the Food Babe confesses her past as a frozen meal junkie and her eventual realization and shock that these meals weren’t “all natural.” One wonders: What made the Food Babe

start to question the naturalness of her TV dinners? Was it the fact that her meal was contained in a small white box? That it was frozen solid? Nope. It was the suspicion that her “Lemongrass Salmon,” “Pineapple Black Pepper Beef,” and “Plum Ginger Grain Crusted Fish” might contain GM ingredients.

This call to the food company was supposed to expose the great conspiracy between food manufacturers and the biotech industry to pull the wool over consumers’ eyes. Yet if one takes a reasoned look at the video, one realizes that in less than ten minutes, the Food Babe was able to get the answers she sought. She was provided a toll-free number. She spoke to an exceedingly pleasant, well-informed woman with infinite patience who provided the Food Babe an honest answer about the product’s ingredients: the frozen meals did indeed contain GM ingredients. Cue the close up, the look of outrage, the anger and disbelief.

Anti-GMO activists like the Food Babe seem obsessed with the idea that government should label all food that includes GM ingredients. But if the Food Babe really wanted to help consumers, she could inform them that the “all natural” label isn’t a reliable way to find GMO-free food, and that a GMO labeling system already exists—the “organic” label. The “organic” label signals that a product is GMO-free, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture monitors food labeled “organic” to ensure compliance.

The Food Babe also fails to explain why she opposes GMOs, why she believes they are harmful, or why she thinks the presence of GM ingredients changed the overall nutritional content of the meal she was eating. Passing over these details is a smart tactic, because there’s simply no legitimate scientific data to back her claims.

The Food Babe has also taken on the manufacturers of Goldfish crackers for placing the word “Natural” on the packaging. She complains that “the product is made with genetically engineered ingredients (GMOs)—namely canola or soybean oil. How can a company claim something is natural when they are using ingredients

made in a laboratory?” Goldfish crackers, it should be noted, are crackers cut and carved to look like tiny goldfish and coated in an orange powder that almost seems to glow.

She seems upset about the use of ingredients developed “in a laboratory.” One wonders what the Food Babe would make of conventional breeders who often work in a laboratory environment. As Henry Miller and Greg Conko explain in their book *The Frankenfood Myth*, before GMOs even existed, farmers and agricultural researchers were selecting and cross breeding plants to obtain desirable results—and they were doing this “natural plant breeding” in a laboratory environment.

By the way, the Food Babe has expanded beyond the role of consumer advocate. She now offers a pay-for-service meal plan that promises to keep you on course and far away from all those GMOs. Her plans range from \$17.99 a month to \$119.88 a year. She also makes money by selling advertising on her website for organic food products. She has quite a following, including over a quarter-million people on Facebook.

The allergen conspiracy

Another woman who benefits by instilling panic among moms is Robyn O’Brien, a Texas mother of four who has become a high-profile food activist. As the mother of an allergic child, O’Brien comes off as a sympathetic speaker with a compelling personal story. In fact, she is a conspiracy theorist who promotes the narrative that the food industry is actively trying to harm the American public. Her child’s allergy, she claims, was caused by the food industry, and she warns mothers that Big Food is working to harm children.

In declaring that GM ingredients are responsible for increases in allergies in children, she lacks any support from the medical professionals in the allergy field. As the *New York Times* noted in an article on O’Brien:

Sitting at the table in her suburban kitchen, with her four young children tumbling in and out, Ms. O’Brien,

36, seems an unlikely candidate to be food’s Erin Brockovich (who, by the way, has taken Ms. O’Brien under her wing).

She grew up in a staunchly Republican family in Houston where lunch at the country club frequented by George and Barbara Bush followed Sunday church services. She was an honors student, earned a master’s degree in business and, like her husband, Jeff, made a living as a financial analyst. . . .

[One day her daughter had an allergic reaction to eggs.] By late that night, she had designed a universal symbol to identify children with food allergies. She now puts the icon, a green stop sign with an exclamation point, on lunch bags, stickers and even the little charms children use to dress up their Crocs. These products and others are sold on her Web site, AllergyKids.com, which she unveiled, strategically, on Mother’s Day in 2006. [The gear is also distributed by Frontier Airlines and Wild Oats stores.]

The \$30,000 Ms. O’Brien made from the products last year is incidental, she said. Working largely from a laptop on her dining room table, she has looked deep into the perplexing world of childhood food allergies and seen a conspiracy that threatens the health of America’s children. And, she profoundly believes, it is up to her and parents everywhere to stop it.

Her theory—that the food supply is being manipulated with additives, genetic modification, hormones and herbicides, causing increases in allergies, autism and other disorders in children—is not supported by leading researchers or the largest allergy advocacy groups.

The *Times* reported that O’Brien “likes to joke that at least she hasn’t started checking the rearview mirror to see if she’s being followed. But some days, her imagination gets away from her and she wonders if it’s only a matter of time

before Big Food tries to stop her from exposing what she sees as a profit-driven global conspiracy whose collateral damage is an alarming increase in childhood food allergies.”

By the time that that article appeared, the nation’s largest allergy advocacy group, Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Network, had already distanced itself from her. Michael Pollan, a prominent food activist, author, and U.C. Berkeley professor, was obliged to ask Ms. O’Brien to stop saying he’d endorsed her work. Yet, despite the distancing and the *Times* exposé, she remained popular and, in circles of elite opinion, credible; she even gave a talk at the highly influential TED conference in 2011.

Ms. O’Brien and the Food Babe have large audiences. They are influential activists demanding changes to the food industry. They fail to inform their readers about how

Editor’s note: In the broadest sense, genetic modification dates back to prehistoric times, thousands of years before the discovery of DNA or of the principles of heredity. American Indians transformed a wild grass called teosinte into corn (maize). People from the Caucasus, Mesopotamia, the Indian subcontinent, and possibly northern Africa domesticated the wild aurochs, turning it into the cow. A similar process created dogs, housecats, almonds, rice, and all other domesticated animals and plants. There are many differences, of course, between domestication in antiquity and today’s use of genetic modification. In antiquity, domestication/modification occurred without government regulation; it was done with no measures to protect the public; and the people doing it had little understanding of what they were doing or of the potential dangers of creating a new lifeform. Provided that reasonable precautions are taken, modern genetic modification may be *less* dangerous to people and the environment than the domestication process that made modern civilization possible.—SJA

the unnecessary changes they propose will affect the average American consumer, even though there's little debate that removing GMOs from the marketplace will cause prices to increase.

The benefits of biotech crops

According to a 2010 study conducted by researchers at Iowa State University, the removal of GMOs from the American food supply would cause prices for corn, soybeans, and canola—three primary ingredients in processed foods—to increase on average 5.8%, 9.6%, and 3.8%, respectively. The researchers estimated that the average global yields for these crops would fall, which would cause a net decline in global production of 14 million tons.

Reasonable moms must consider the broader picture when contemplating a ban on GMOs. Do moms really want to support policies that will raise the cost of food and decrease the supply, at a time when billions of people live in poverty? Moms should know about the worldwide impact of scientific progress in agriculture, and about the ways in which GM crops have improved the lives of the world's poor and may further improve their lives in the future. For instance, a strain of GM rice called Golden Rice has been genetically modified to contain Vitamin A. This rice has the potential to save millions of children in the developing world from blindness, a common affliction among children whose diets are deficient in Vitamin A. Yet, largely because of continued scare-mongering, Golden Rice remains off the market and unavailable to children at risk.

Not all such beneficial technology has been blocked, however. Take the case of biotech crops in India, where women do most of the manual labor on farms. According to a study by Dr. Arjunan Subramanian of Warwick University and Dr. Matin Qaim of the University of Göttingen, much of the benefit of growing biotech cotton went to female farm workers who worked on the farms; they saw their incomes rise by an average 55% from 2002-2008. And because farmers were able to plant more crops, employment rates also increased.

The researchers added that because of increased wages for all workers, some women were able to leave farm labor: "For family female labor, additional income from *Bt* cotton leads to withdrawal of in-house females from farming activities, raising the quality of life of women. . . . [Overall,] *Bt* cotton enhances the quality of life of women through increasing income and reducing 'femmanual' work."

Biotech crops have the potential to alleviate one of the oldest problems to afflict mankind: starvation. For instance, in 2011, international aid organizations started raising the alarm that ten million people risked starvation because of drought conditions in Ethiopia, Somalia, and northern Kenya. The British newspaper *The Independent* reported:

Tens of thousands of people have left their homes in search of water and food. Hundreds of thousands of farm animals have died. Every day some 1,200 Somalis are crossing the border into Kenya where, near the town of Dadaab, the world's biggest refugee camp, 50 kilometers square, has developed. Many of the children arriving there, after month-long treks across the unyielding desert, are so weak that they are dying despite receiving emergency care. Millions more are hungry and have begun the slow journey to wasting from malnutrition.

In 2014, the International Institute for Tropical Agriculture (IITA), a research organization that focuses on hunger, malnutrition, and poverty, announced the development of drought-tolerant corn, which could boost corn (maize) production in African countries that face poor harvests as a result of drought. Scientists continue to work on other life-saving biotech food products, such as tomatoes that can help unclog arteries, cows that produce allergy-free milk, and crops that actually contain vaccines (such as bananas genetically modified to produce vaccines against Hepatitis B)—new technology to eliminate diseases faster than traditional vaccine programs, and at a much lower cost.

Women concerned about the environment should also consider the agricultural benefits of biotech crops. While farmers can choose to plant conventional seed or GM seeds, biotech crops require less land, tillage, and chemical use, and have much higher yields than conventional crops.

Anti-GMO activists ignore these positive stories and focus on the heretofore unproven claims that GMOs are dangerous and should be banned from the worldwide food supply. A federal ban would work to the benefit of activists who would avoid the cost and inconvenience of running state and local initiatives to ban GMOs. Such a ban would force food manufacturers to find non-GMO ingredient replacements for processed food. A ban would even affect the meat and dairy industries, because livestock often consume GMO feed and dairy cows are injected with the genetically engineered hormone rBGH/rBST.

Knowledgeable activists, however, know a federal ban won't happen. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Department of Agriculture already approve GM ingredients in food products. Because thousands of farmers choose to plant GM seed each year, it's unlikely that members of Congress from agriculture states would support a ban. Interestingly, President Obama has shown little interest in supporting the anti-GMO movement.

And so most activists have decided to work toward the much more realistic goal of GMO labeling mandates. To many moms, this seems reasonable. After all, they aren't asking for bans on GMOs, just for a little label on the front of the package. What harm can that do? Plenty.

Large corporations will view these regulations as nuisances, but larger corporations are better able than their smaller competitors to absorb the costs of regulations; for instance, by choosing not to hire more employees or by not offering as many employee benefits. Thus, Big Food won't be hurt much by these labeling laws. Large companies also have lawyers on staff to handle the lawsuits that will inevitably be brought against food companies that are

accused of mislabeling products or which, out of ignorance or misunderstanding, fail to follow the labeling requirements. Smaller businesses—the very businesses many anti-Big Food activists claim to support—will suffer more under these regulations.

Businesses, big and small, share concern about the message a “contains GMOs” label sends to their customers. Considering the amount of misinformation that exists about GMOs and the hysterical accusations lobbed at biotech companies, manufactures of any size understandably worry that this label may irrationally drive consumers away from their products.

Activists target moms with their message that GM foods should be avoided. Although many or most moms will not fully accept the hype about the dangers of GMOs, others will follow the “precautionary principle”—“better safe than sorry.” The activists want to create a demand for non-GMO food so that eventually food manufacturers remove GM ingredients from their products—not because GMOs are dangerous, mind you, but because people simply avoid products with the ominous GMO label.

Sometimes activists admit their goal isn’t to inform consumers but to destroy the biotech industry. Consider what Geert Ritsema of Friends of the Earth Europe has said:

If these products all have to be labeled, who is going to put it on the market? It’s a big risk for food companies and for retailers because they run the risk that the clients don’t take the product. The market rejections and the consumer rejections plus the labeling laws will make sure that GMOs will not enter in Europe.

And according to organic food activist Joseph Mercola, the labeling issue is the best way to eliminate GM food from the marketplace, which again, is the ultimate goal:

Personally, I believe GM foods must be banned entirely, but labeling is the most efficient way to achieve this. Since 85% of the public will refuse

to buy foods they know to be genetically modified, this will effectively eliminate them from the market just the way it was done in Europe.

In the absence of a federal GMO labeling law, state and local laws have been floated in several states. New Hampshire and Connecticut recently passed labeling bills, and last December, a bill prohibiting biotech companies from operating on Hawaii’s Big Island was signed. The law will limit farmers’ seed choices to only non-GMO varieties, with the exception of two crops that were grown on the Big Island prior to the bill’s passage: corn used as feed, and papayas.

Activists in California have had mixed success. Last year, voters defeated a state-wide GMO labeling law, while Mendocino County, Marin County, and Arcata, California banned the growing of GMO seed. In Washington State, San Juan County recently banned GMOs. Alaska lawmakers are also jumping on the anti-GMO bandwagon, introducing legislation to ban the use of genetically engineered seeds or plants in Alaska.

Women have choices

American women are lucky to have easy access to affordable and healthy food. Compared to the rest of the world, Americans spend only a small fraction of their yearly earnings on groceries. This is particularly important for Americans living under the poverty level who, according to a 2012 study by anti-hunger organization Share our Strength, tend to eat more often at home, preparing simple meals for their families.

Food manufacturers are also responding to consumer demand by making food healthier. According to a new Robert Wood Johnson Foundation report, since 2007, food companies have cut 6.4 trillion calories out of the marketplace and pledge to cut another 1.5 trillion by 2015. That’s good news for consumers and particularly good news for America’s poor, the group with highest rates of obesity.

Why, then, are so many food activists working to raise food costs? I ask the

question because that’s what will happen if the anti-GMO movement has its way. Prices will likely soar, and women will find far fewer choices in the marketplace as food manufacturers, particularly small operations, face new obstacles: a new set of crushing regulatory requirements, activist-inspired lawsuits, and, thanks to continued scaremongering about GMOs, a dwindling customer base.

Most importantly, women must recognize the patronizing message of activists pushing for GMO labels. After all, since organic food cannot contain GMOs, women concerned about GMOs can easily look for the “organic” label. Industry analysts estimate that U.S. organic food sales were \$28 billion in 2012 (up 11% from 2011), and the sector is expected to grow at a faster rate in the next decade. In addition, many manufacturers already choose to voluntarily put labels on their food. In other words, if you want GMO-free food, you can easily find it.

Women need to know the truth about GMOs and their potential to improve living conditions for the poor and help feed the earth’s growing population. More importantly, women should pause before being swayed by the anti-GMO activists who suggest that women can’t feed their children without the guidance of politicians and bureaucrats.

Julie Gunlock, the director of the Independent Women Forum’s Culture of Alarmism Project, has worked as a senior Congressional staffer and has written widely about food and culture for such outlets as the Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, Forbes, U.S. News & World Report, and National Review. Her new book is From Cupcakes to Chemicals: How the Culture of Alarmism is Making Us Afraid of Everything and How to Fight Back. **GW**

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GreenNotes

At a press conference with other members of the **Senate's Climate Action Task Force**—i.e., the Global Warming caucus—**Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders** (a socialist/independent who caucuses with **Democrats**) said Senators would aggressively push TV networks to cover the Warming issue. “It is beyond my comprehension that you have **ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox**, that their Sunday shows have discussed climate change in 2012, collectively, for all of eight minutes,” Sanders said, citing claims by **Media Matters for America**, which promotes left-wing bias in the news media.

Sanders added, “Sunday news shows are obviously important because they talk to millions of people, but they go beyond that by helping to define what the establishment considers to be important and what is often discussed during the rest of the week.” Later, Sanders and U.S. Sen. **Brian Schatz** (D-Hawaii) met with CBS News president **David Rhodes** to press him on the matter.

Sanders, in an op-ed written with Sen. **Barbara Boxer** (D-Calif.), celebrated how Big Business has climbed on the Warming bandwagon. “More than 700 companies that drive the U.S. economy—including **Microsoft, Owens Corning, General Motors, the Portland Trail Blazers, and candymaker Mars**—have signed a declaration calling for national action on climate change,” they crowed, adding that “Climate change is the single greatest threat to our country and our planet.”

Following the shift toward radicalism of formerly mainstream organizations like the **Sierra Club**, is eco-terrorism on the rise? In February, the **Daily Caller** reported on the incident in the photo at left: “Masked protesters carrying torches and threatening organized violence protested outside the home of an executive at a major oil pipeline company ... Eight environmental activists gathered on the lawn of **Mark Maki**, a member of the **Enbridge Energy Company's** board of directors and president of **Enbridge Energy Management**, to protest the arrests of three anti-pipeline activists” who had chained themselves to construction equipment. Said one of the protesters on the lawn: “Tell the rest of the board they can expect visits.”



And was an attack near **Silicon Valley** an instance of “green” terrorism? It occurred in April 2013, but details only became publicly known last month. At **Pacific Gas & Electric's Metcalf** transmission substation, which serves Silicon Valley, intruders lifted heavy manhole covers in two places, climbed under the road, and cut fiber optic cables, temporarily disrupting phone service. They

fired more than 100 rounds into substation equipment, knocking out 17 of 20 big transformers. Former **CIA Director Jim Woolsey** called it “a systematic attempt to take down the electric grid.”

Referring to climate change as a “great demon,” the **Church of England** has said that, if necessary, it will withdraw investments from companies that don't toe the environmentalist line on Global Warming. The Rev. Prof. **Richard Burridge**, dean of **King's College London** and deputy chair of the church's **Ethical Investment Advisory Group**, opposed immediate disinvestment from companies associated with “fossil” fuels, because the church's investments give environmentalists leverage to affect the companies' policies. The “fundamental problem,” he sniffed, is “our selfishness and our way of life, which has been fuelled by plentiful, cheap energy and more and more people around the world wanting that.” Heaven forbid!

The **British** government currently is led by the **Conservative Party** (Tories) in coalition with the **Liberal Democrats**. Despite its name, the Conservative Party today is dominated by supporters of Big Government who, here, would be called RINOs. The Tories are committed to extremist, anti-science Global Warming policies that have helped double fuel prices in the past six years and have thrown one in four households—soon to be one in three—into “fuel poverty” (spending more than 10% of income on heating). The British newspaper **The Observer** reported in 2011 that “Two hundred people, most of them elderly, will die in Britain of cold-related diseases every day this winter,” according to the U.K.'s leading advocacy group for senior citizens. These cruel policies have led to the rapid growth of the pro-freedom **U.K. Independence Party**, which holds nine of the U.K.'s 73 seats in the **European Parliament** and, in 2013 local elections, had the biggest surge of any minor party since World War II. One recent poll gave UKIP a 27% plurality as the country's most popular political party.

At the same time, **Europe** as a whole may be moving away from environmentalist extremism. The **German** newsmagazine **Der Spiegel** reports the **European Commission**, the governing body of the E.U., “wants to forgo ambitious climate protection goals . . . EU member states are no longer to receive specific guidelines for the development” of so-called renewable energy. Also on the agenda: approval for fracking.