In 2014, Vermont became the first state to pass a law requiring the labeling of genetically modified, or GMO, foods, which is set to take effect on July 1. But, until recently it was unknown whether Vermont, or other states considering similar measures, would be able to move forward with implementing such legislation.

While 64 countries require labeling indicating whether food products contain genetically modified organisms, a bill recently introduced in the U.S. Senate would have prevented states from passing mandatory GMO labeling laws and overridden Vermont’s labeling mandate. However, the bill failed to garner the 60 votes needed to advance in the Senate in a vote on March 16. The U.S. House of Representatives passed a similar bill last year.

Vermont’s GMO labeling law was also challenged in federal court shortly after passage by industry groups. While the court rejected a request to block the law from taking effect, the case has been appealed to the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, which still could stop the law’s implementation.

Vermont is not the only state that has acted on this issue. Both Maine and Connecticut passed legislation requiring labels on foods containing GMOs. However, under both laws, nearby states must pass similar legislation before the law takes effect. While legislation has recently been introduced in several states that would require GMO labeling, no additional states have adopted laws like
As Vermont’s labeling requirement seems poised to take effect as scheduled, the food industry is grappling with how to respond. General Mills announced Friday that it would start labeling all of its GMO-containing products, regardless of where those products will be sold. Kellogg’s and Mars also announced their intent to do the same. In contrast, other food companies are considering pulling their products from Vermont shelves, while others continue to press for a uniform, national solution.

Michigan has echoed this sentiment and passed a resolution in 2015 urging the U.S. Congress to pass legislation establishing a national, scientifically-based standard for GMO labeling. Policymakers can expect GMO labeling to continue to be a contentious issue, with numerous bills on the issue currently pending in a variety of states and at the federal level.

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