

July 3, 2007

The Honourable George Abbot  
Minister of Health  
PO Box 9050, Stn Prov Govt.  
Victoria, BC  
V8W 9E2

To: Honourable George Abbot, British Columbia Minister of Health

**Re: Genetically Modified Foods – A call for mandatory labeling**

We are writing on behalf of the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority (VCH) to request your support on a very important nutrition and health issue: the mandatory labeling of genetically modified seeds and food. VCH is one of Canada's largest health regions and provides services to over 1 million people in Vancouver, Richmond, the North Shore and coastal areas. As the steward of publically funded health care in our region, we want to ensure that a voice from our Health Authority is provided on this health issue.

In recent years, Canadian and International experts have provided the public with key recommendations concerning the use of GMOs in our food system. In 2001, the Royal Society of Canada in their report "Elements of Precaution: The Regulation of Food Biotechnology in Canada", recommended the use of the precautionary principle, which calls for a more rigorous approval and monitoring system for GMOs. Similarly, the British Columbia Provincial Health Officer has recommended in his Report for 2005 that all genetically modified foods be labeled for consumer choice. At Vancouver Coastal Health, we share these concerns and would like to see a precautionary approach to this issue and believe that mandatory labeling is a necessary starting point to ensure the capacity to track and monitor the impact of GMOs, and provide consumer choice. The need to make labeling mandatory is particularly necessary as the current system of voluntary labeling has not yielded adequate results.

There is clear precedent for such action, as over 40 countries (including the European Union) have now established mandatory labeling for genetically modified foods. In addition to the benefits for consumer choice, mandatory labeling of GMO's is a critical

first step for monitoring the long-term effects of GMOs and providing a mechanism for recall should a problem ever develop.

We would also request that you please include our Population Health and Community Nutrition team in any discussions and developments towards policies and regulations in this regard. We are pleased to include a copy of our background paper exploring these complex issues. We look forward to working with you on this issue. Our contact for this initiative is Claire Gram, Regional Coordinator, Healthy Communities and Community Food Security (Email: [Claire.Gram@vch.ca](mailto:Claire.Gram@vch.ca); Tel: 604-875-5600 (Local 67636).

Sincerely,



John Blatherwick, CM, CD, OBC, MD, FRCP (C)  
Chief Medical Health Officer

cc Honourable Gordon Campbell, Premier  
Honourable Tony Clement, Federal Minister of Health  
BC Health Officer's Council (HOC)  
Dr Perry Kendall, Provincial Medical Health Officer

Encl. GMO Background Paper, June 2007