

1 The Board of Directors recommends this resolution be sent to a Committee of the General
2 Synod.

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4 **RESOLUTION TO SUPPORT LEGISLATION REQUIRING LABELING OF**
5 **GENETICALLY ENGINEERED FOODS ON FOOD PACKAGING**

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7 **Submitted by the Connecticut Conference of the United Church of Christ**
8 **A Resolution of Witness**

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10 **SUMMARY**

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12 This resolution calls on people of faith to be more aware of the new world of genetic
13 engineering (GE) that is beginning to transform our world and impact our lives. While the new
14 science of epigenetics and genetic engineering may offer much promise, there are concerns
15 about how the science is being applied. The ability to combine genes from different species
16 outside of naturally reproductive methods and create new forms of life has given humans the
17 God-like powers of creation. Faith communities must bear witness to how this power is
18 responsibly exercised for the common good and not just for profit. With regard to GE foods,
19 because we do not know the long-term health consequences of consuming such foods,
20 consumers should take responsibility to learn more about GE foods and make informed choices
21 about what is best for their health and the health of loved ones, especially for the most
22 vulnerable: the young, elderly and those with special health conditions. Therefore this
23 resolution calls on the United Church of Christ in all its settings to support the labeling of GE
24 foods.

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26 **BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL GROUNDING**

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28 *And God saw that it was good.* (Genesis 1:12)

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30 After each day of creation God was pleased with his work and attested to its perfection. We are
31 made in God's image and God seeks our flourishing. We are made healthy and are sustained by
32 healthy foods.ⁱ Good food is the best form of preventive medicine. Poor diet affects health and
33 poor diet in childhood can have detrimental health repercussions later in life. GE crops have
34 been altered to survive herbicides that function to deprive weeds of needed minerals, therefore
35 GE crops themselves are nutritionally compromised foods that do not provide the necessary
36 building blocks for bodily health.ⁱⁱ

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38 *You shall be holy, for I the Lord God am holy.* (Leviticus 19:2)

39 One way to be holy is to be aware of and appreciate the wondrous and incredible complexity of
40 God's Creation; how everything is connected and how in those interconnections everything is
41 one, whole, and holy. The world is a complex system. It is a complex system of complex
42 systems. Epigenetics is a complex system.ⁱⁱⁱ Soil ecology is a complex system. The human gut
43 is a complex system. All these are affected by GE crops in ways we do not yet fully know.^{iv}
44 We need to be careful and mindful when developing genetically engineered foods. Are they
45 truly necessary? Are they safe for the environment and human body?^v Are business practices
46 associated with promoting GE foods good and fair to consumers and farmers?

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Divide your means seven ways, or even eight, for you do not know what disaster may happen on earth. (Ecclesiastes 11:2)

Genetic diversity is a key element to species adaptation and evolution. Different species flourished in different times depending on environmental conditions which change. The domination of a few GE seeds in the marketplace undermines diversity and the potential for crop species adaptation.

But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. (Mark 13:32-33)

Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family you did it to me. (Matthew 25:40)

Jesus calls on his disciples to be alert and bear witness to the times. As Christians we are called to bear witness to our times, which includes the new science of epigenetics and genetic engineering.^{vi} This new science has given humankind God-like powers to create new forms of life. With that new power comes responsibility not to harm the least of us, those most vulnerable to radical changes in the nature and quality of our food supply. We must exercise the precautionary principle and not risk harm for the sake of profit.^{vii}

MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY

All of us desire good health. It is important for the consumer to understand the connection between good health and good food. Healthy eating is the best form of preventive medicine. A desired outcome of this resolution is for us to help each other gain knowledge about GE crops and foods, and their effect on the environment and human health. Also with regard to unethical government and business practices that have stymied public access to knowledge and independent studies of GE foods.^{viii} A desired outcome is for all of us to live healthier lives. Of particular concern are people who do not have access to nutritional foods. Supporting urban gardens, farmers' markets, and public education about food nutrition and diet would be invaluable.

INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

Leadership and staffing is already in place in conferences and churches with environmental ministry teams, or teams focused on public health. Members of these ministry teams can take leadership roles on the issue of GE foods, health and the environment if they feel the call and passion. There are national organizations such Food Democracy Now, the Sierra Club, and Food Water Watch, which provide educational material and training. These organizations can also be important collaborators in grass roots organizing efforts. To bear witness to our times is an essential practice of the church. The wisdom of the church brings a moral weight to any issue it engages. Churches also provide refuge to activists involved in the political struggles around an issue. In Connecticut, the GMO Free CT leadership team met monthly at a United

93 Church of Christ church in New Haven and churches across the state provided venues for panel
94 discussions and film screenings about the topic. Leaders and United Church of Christ
95 Conference lobbyists can also help to educate state representatives who have the power to
96 introduce legislation such as right-to-know labeling laws.

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98 **PROBABILITY OF INFLUENCING SOCIAL CHANGE**

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100 Since consumers are directly impacted by GE foods, any knowledge they gain in the issue
101 might influence consumer habits, culminating in broader social changes around health and diet.
102 The passing of GE labeling bills by state legislatures in Connecticut, Maine and Vermont have
103 shown the effectiveness of a combination of grassroots organizing, state lobbying, social media
104 and public education. Ballot initiatives on the same issue in California, Colorado and Oregon
105 have not been as successful, although efforts there helped to bring the issue to the attention of
106 the general public. The proliferation of health food stores, restaurants, and counters in
107 conventional supermarkets has provided more access and choice for consumers. As the demand
108 grows for healthy food so will supply and affordability.

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110 **TEXT OF MOTION**

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112 WHEREAS, “Then God said, ‘Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit
113 trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.’ And it was so. The earth brought
114 forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with
115 the seed in it. And God saw that it was good,” (*Genesis 1:11-12*); and

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117 “The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and
118 tenants. Throughout the land that you hold, you shall provide for the redemption of the land,”
119 (*Leviticus 25:23-24*); and

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121 WHEREAS, the tapestry of God’s creation is woven with the beauty of extravagant diversity;
122 from bacteria to begonias to our own lives, the diverse interconnected fabric of life calls forth
123 our awe and wonder; and

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125 WHEREAS, reflecting on this diversity and the continuing presence of God’s grace in our lives,
126 members of the United Church of Christ need to be concerned about the threats to bio- and
127 agricultural diversity posed by current activities in genetic engineering of plants and animals
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130 WHEREAS, These technologies are emerging within the context of a history of the overuse of
131 land, the homogenization of agriculture, and the brutal exploitation of nonhuman animal life in
132 search of ever higher profits; and,

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134 WHEREAS, the technologies allowing genetic modifications of plants, animals and microbes
135 now allow manipulation of life at a basic level may offer benefits for humankind, but they may
136 also speed the destruction of God’s creation; and

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138 WHEREAS, Genetically Engineered Foods (GE foods) are products that have been genetically

138 modified at the cellular level, combining DNA molecules from different species to create a new
139 set of genes, including the creation of transgenic plants, fish, or animals, which contain material
140 from at least one unrelated organism, such as a virus, insect, animal, or even a human being;
141 and

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143 WHEREAS, humankind's attempt to patent and claim total ownership of life and all of life's
144 offspring should be understood as extreme hubris, antithetical to God's purposes, and an affront
145 to God and creation; and

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147 WHEREAS, even as the moral and ethical implications of GE foods are profound, they
148 continue to be largely unexamined, even as more and more GE foods are being created; and

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150 WHEREAS, genetically engineered plants now encompass economically important and widely
151 planted human and animal food crops, including corn, soybeans, sugar beets, cotton, rice,
152 canola, to name just a few, with some of these genetically modified crops representing up to 80
153 percent of total production in their categories; and

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155 WHEREAS, as fewer farmers plant non-modified seeds, the diversity of our world's seed
156 stocks is diminished, undermining the earth's bio-diversity and endangering environmental
157 resilience; and

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159 WHEREAS, long term health effects of ingesting genetically engineered foods in human beings
160 are largely unknown, because GE food seed companies decline use of their seeds to
161 independent researchers; and

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163 WHEREAS, individuals and the United States have a right to know if their food was produced
164 with genetic engineering for a variety of reasons, including health, economic, environmental,
165 religious, and ethical; and

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167 WHEREAS, more than 60 countries, including all 27 member states of the European Union, as
168 well as South Korea, Japan, Brazil, Australia, India, China, and other key United States trading
169 partners have laws or regulations mandating disclosure of genetically engineered food on food
170 labels; and

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172 WHEREAS, government legislation to require labeling of genetically engineered foods has
173 already been introduced in more than 25 states and the Congress of the United States, and
174 Connecticut, Maine and Vermont passing labeling laws; and

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176 WHEREAS, since 1983, the General Synod of the United Church of Christ has repeatedly
177 called for a Christian response to developments in genetic engineering;

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179 THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Thirtieth General Synod of the United Church of
180 Christ calls upon all members to advocate with state legislators and members of Congress for
181 legislation requiring mandatory labeling of genetically engineered food.

182 **FUNDING**

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184 The funding for the implementation of the Resolution will be made in accordance with the
185 overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

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187 **IMPLEMENTATION**

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189 The Officers of the Church, in consultation with appropriate ministries or other entities within
190 the United Church of Christ, will determine the implementing body.

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192 **ENDNOTES**

ⁱ See the United Church of Christ Statement of Health and Welfare (1985) and the “Resolution Reclaiming the Church Ministry of Health and Healing” passed by the 21st General Synod, which states that “good health is a part of God’s intention for all people.” Also see “Resolution for Faithful and Mindful Eating,” passed by the 28th General Synod, calls on us to be mindful our how dietary choices have consequences for the environment, human well-being, and animal welfare.

ⁱⁱ GM Crops – Just the Science: Research Documenting the Limitations, Risks and Alternatives.

<http://www.nongmoproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/07/GM-Crops-just-the-science.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ See Barry Commoner, “Unraveling the DNA Myth: The Spurious Foundation of Genetic Engineering.” *Harpers*, February 2002. <http://croker.harpeethhall.org/Must%20Know/Science/DNAMythCommoner.pdf>

^{iv} Ari LeVaux, “The Very Real Danger of Genetically Modified Foods.” *The Atlantic*, January 9, 2012.

<http://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2012/01/the-very-real-danger-of-genetically-modified-foods/251051/>

^v GM Crops – Just the Science: Research Documenting the Limitations, Risks and Alternatives.

<http://www.nongmoproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/07/GM-Crops-just-the-science.pdf>

^{vi} The General Synod of the United Church of Christ has repeatedly called for a Christian response to developments in genetic engineering, including the 14th General Synod (1983 Resolution: Concern about the Moral and Ethical Implications of Genetic Engineering), the 16th General Synod (1987 Resolution: The Church and Genetic Engineering), the 17th General Synod (1989 Pronouncement: The Church and Genetic Engineering), the 21st General Synod (1997 Resolution: The Cloning of Mammalian Species), and the 23rd General Synod (2001 Resolution: A Christian Response to Development in Genetic Technology).

^{vii} See the resolution “A Theological Response to Corporate Greed,” adopted by the 24th General Synod calling for a higher standard of corporate behavior and social responsibility that is not “limited to a single-minded focus on maximizing short-term gains to the exclusion of all other business goals and responsibilities.”

^{viii} The Editors, “Do Seed Companies Control GM Research?” *Scientific American* Jul 20, 2009.

<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/do-seed-companies-control-gm-crop-research/>.