

Industry Aims to Strip Local Control of Food Supply

New Laws Being Pushed by Industry Prevent Local Decisions About Plants and Seeds

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Legislation aiming to prevent counties, towns and cities from making local decisions about our food supply is being introduced in states across the nation. Fifteen states recently have introduced legislation removing local control of plants and seeds. Twelve of these states have already passed the provisions into law.

These highly orchestrated industry actions are in response to recent local decisions to safeguard sustainable food systems. To date, initiatives in three California counties have restricted the cultivation of genetically modified crops, livestock, and other organisms and nearly 100 New England towns have passed various resolutions in support of limits on genetically engineered crops.

“These laws are industry’s stealth response to a growing effort by people to protect their communities at the local level,” said Britt Bailey of Environmental Commons. “Given the impacts of known ecological contamination from genetic modification, local governments need to retain the power to protect the health, safety, and welfare of their citizens. Local restrictions against genetically modified crops have provided a positive and hopeful solution and allowed citizens to take meaningful action in their hometown or county.”

“Over the past several years in Iowa, we’ve seen local control taken away for the benefit of the corporate hog industry,” said George Naylor, an Iowa farmer and President of the National Family Farm Coalition. “With these pre-emption bills signed into law, we are

now losing our ability to protect ourselves from irresponsible corporations aiming to control the agricultural seeds and plants planted throughout the state.”

According to Kristy Meyer of the Ohio Environmental Council, “The amendment to our House Bill 66 would strip cities and villages of their authority to implement safeguards and standards concerning seeds. Supporting local control is quintessentially American, clearly reasonable, and represents the standards our country was founded upon.”

In the past decade, the same preemptive strategy has been used by the tobacco industry to thwart local efforts to introduce more stringent smoking laws. As Tina Walls of Phillip Morris & Co. admitted, “By introducing preemptive statewide legislation, we can shift the battle away from the community level back to the state legislatures where we are on stronger ground.”

See attached backgrounder (online at <http://www.environmentalcommons.org/seedlawbackgrounder.html>) for contacts, resources, and discussions of:

- Why this challenge to local rights?
- Who is behind this strategy of state pre-emption?
- Why is this a matter for wide public concern?
- What are the legal precedents for local action?

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