Memorandum of Support

June 1, 2016

A.617-B (Rosenthal)/S.485-B (LaValle)

Title: Provides for the labeling of food or food products that contain a genetically modified material/organism (GMO) or that is produced with a genetically modified material.

Purpose: This legislation requires the labeling of genetically engineered foods and other consumable products made from genetically engineered materials. The bill defines what would qualify as GMO foods as well as provides exemptions from labeling under certain circumstances. The bill also imposes penalties for false labeling and misbranding.

Statement of Support: Genetically engineered, or the more common phrase “genetically modified organisms” (GMOs), are plants or animals created through manipulation of an organism’s DNA – merging DNA from different species that cannot occur in nature. This DNA tampering changes the characteristics of organisms as they develop.

While GMO’s have been developed to increase crop yields, reduce pesticide use and reduce energy use, a growing body of scientific evidence demonstrates that GMO crops are contributing to a host of environmental and human health problems:

- Can be toxic, allergenic or less nutritious than natural crops;
- Can create serious problems for farmers – including herbicide-tolerant “superweeds,” compromising soil quality and actually increasing pesticide use;
- Disrupt ecosystems, and reduce biodiversity;
- Are often just as energy-intensive as other chemically-farmed crops
- The World Health Organization (WHO) reclassified glyphosate (the key ingredient in the Round-Up herbicide) as a probable carcinogen.

The long-term effects of genetically engineered foods are still not fully understood because gene manipulation is relatively new and establishing correlation with human health impacts may take decades to establish. Foods produced from or containing GMOs may contain new substances or have purposeful or inadvertent compositional changes and have the potential to cause a variety of health problems. Sadly, consumers are not informed which products contain genetically modified organisms when they are in the supermarket. This legislation would provide New Yorkers with that information and allow consumers to make informed decisions when choosing food products for their families.

Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter Strongly Urges Your Support Of A.617-B/S.485-B