

Oregon GMO labeling proponents concede defeat

December 11 2014, by Jonathan J. Cooper

Proponents of an Oregon ballot measure requiring labels on genetically modified foods conceded defeat Thursday after a judge ruled against them and an automatic recount appeared unlikely to sway the outcome.

The Yes on 92 campaign said there are no legal options remaining that could lead them to victory.

"The labeling movement will continue to grow," the campaign said in a statement. "We draw strength from the fact that we came so achingly close to winning this vote, despite being outspent by more than \$12 million."

Measure 92 was defeated by just 812 votes out of 1.5 million, triggering an automatic recount. The second tally showed a net shift of 25 votes against the initiative. The results cover all 36 counties but have not yet been certified.

The proponents said they would continue working toward a labeling requirement for genetically modified organisms, or GMOs, but stopped short of promising a 2016 campaign.

The initiative would have required manufacturers, retailers and suppliers to label raw or packaged foods produced entirely or partially by genetic engineering.

"After looking at the facts about Measure 92, Oregon voters decided that

it rightly deserved a no vote," Pat McCormick, a spokesman for the No on 92 Coalition, said in a statement.

Oregon is the fourth state in the West to oppose a labeling requirement for genetically modified foods, but Oregon came closer than efforts in California, Colorado and Washington.

Congress could step into the debate next year. A congressional hearing Wednesday previewed Republican efforts to push federal legislation that would override state laws mandating labels.

There's little science that says genetically engineered foods are unsafe, and agribusinesses fear mandatory labels would spook consumers. Most of the nation's corn and soybeans are genetically engineered to resist pests and herbicides.

Labeling proponents say there's too much that's unknown about GMOs, and consumers have a right to know what's in their food.

The Yes on 92 campaign filed a lawsuit earlier this week hoping to get a count of 4,600 ballots that were rejected. Oregon conducts elections entirely by mail and only counts ballots if the signature on the envelope matches the one on file with a person's voter registration.

A judge on Tuesday rejected the campaign's request for a temporary injunction preventing the certification of the recount results.

The campaign was the most expensive in Oregon history with combined spending of nearly \$30 million. Proponents were backed primarily by natural food companies and advocates. The opposition campaign was funded by agricultural companies and food manufacturers.

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