Research Abstract

Since the development of agricultural biotechnology in the late 20th century, genetically modified organisms (GMOs) have been a contentious issue throughout the world. There are various benefits to biotechnology and current scientific research demonstrates no threats to human health or the environment. Still, many stand staunchly opposed to genetically modified organisms for ecological, health, ethical, and political concerns, amongst others. As a result, GMOs have been regulated throughout the world. The United States’ federal regulatory framework has been criticized as inadequate, and in response many states have introduced regulatory legislation. GMO labeling is a favored strategy; various polls have demonstrated widespread public support for labeling, regardless of political affiliation or position on biotechnology. Vermont GMO labeling law, Act 120, is currently the strongest labeling legislation passed in the United States.

My research analyzes the factors pushing, shaping, and opposing Vermont’s GMO labeling law. My approach uses Act 120 as a case study to understand the use of labeling as a regulatory strategy, and the role of public opinion and lobbyists in shaping this policy. The time frame of my case study is January 2013 to May 2014, from when the bill was introduced to when it was signed into law. My research addresses why positive labeling was chosen as the regulatory strategy, anticipated and hypothesized outcomes of the legislation, and alternate strategies that were suggested in place of positive labeling. To accomplish these objectives, I undertook four specific methods: primary document analysis of the bill; interviews of legislators, campaign coordinators, and lobbyists; financial analysis of lobbyist and organizational expenditures; and analysis of organizational support strategies and outreach.