

Industry Profile: Grocery Manufacturers Association

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The Grocery Manufacturers Association (GMA) represents more than 300 of the United States' biggest food and beverage companies.¹ GMA members also include some of the largest seed and biotechnology companies (like Monsanto, Dow AgroSciences and Syngenta).²

The GMA lobbies the federal and state governments to keep business costs low for its members by keeping regulations loose or even voluntary. The priorities of the GMA align with its member companies' bottom lines, and not with the health and well-being of consumers. The GMA fights to keep genetically engineered foods (GMOs) unlabeled, to oppose mandatory country-of-origin labeling and to block any limitations on marketing junk food to children.

The GMA is governed by its Board of Directors, made up of CEOs and company leaders of 50 of the member companies. The board represents some of the largest food companies in the United States, including ConAgra, General Mills, Kellogg Company, PepsiCo, Dean Foods, Unilever, Kraft and Smithfield.³ (See Table.)

Influencing Government

The GMA is a powerful player in Washington. Between 2001 and 2012, the GMA political action committee donated more than \$1 million to federal candidates, political parties and other campaign committees.⁴ But it is a much bigger presence roaming the halls of Congress. From 2004 to 2013, the GMA spent \$38.9 million lobbying the U.S. Congress and federal officials.⁵ In 2013 alone, the GMA spent \$14.3 million lobbying on food labeling, country-of-origin labeling, labeling foods with genetically engineered ingredients (commonly known as GMO labeling), food marketing to children and other regulations affecting the food and beverage industry.⁶ According to the Center for Responsive Politics, in 2013, 32 out of 38 GMA lobbyists were well-connected former legislative or executive branch staffers, including a 25-year veteran of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) who became a lobbyist after heading the FDA's food safety office under President George W. Bush.⁷

The GMA also has a strong footprint on state legislatures. The GMA and its employees donated more than \$785,000 to state assembly candidates and ballot measures in 24 states and had lobbyists in at least 15 states between 2003 and 2012, according to the Institute for Money in State Politics.⁸

Blocking State Efforts to Pass GMO Labeling

The GMA has led the effort to defeat GMO labeling efforts at the state level. The GMA and its member companies donated a combined \$54.7 million to defeat GMO labeling ballot initiatives in California in 2012 and Washington state in 2013.⁹ (See Figure on page 3.) In 2012, GMA president Pamela Bailey declared that defeating California's Prop 37 GMO labeling ballot initiative was the "single-highest priority for GMA [that] year."¹⁰ The GMA and its member companies narrowly defeated the California ballot initiative (48.6 percent of voters supported GMO labels and 51.4 percent opposed), thanks to the food and biotechnology industries' \$35.7 million in campaign advertising against the initiative.¹¹

In California, GMA member companies donated directly to the campaign to defeat the GMO labeling initiative, but some advocates encouraged consumers to boycott food companies that opposed the measure, and shareholder advocates urged companies to stop opposing GMO labeling efforts.¹²

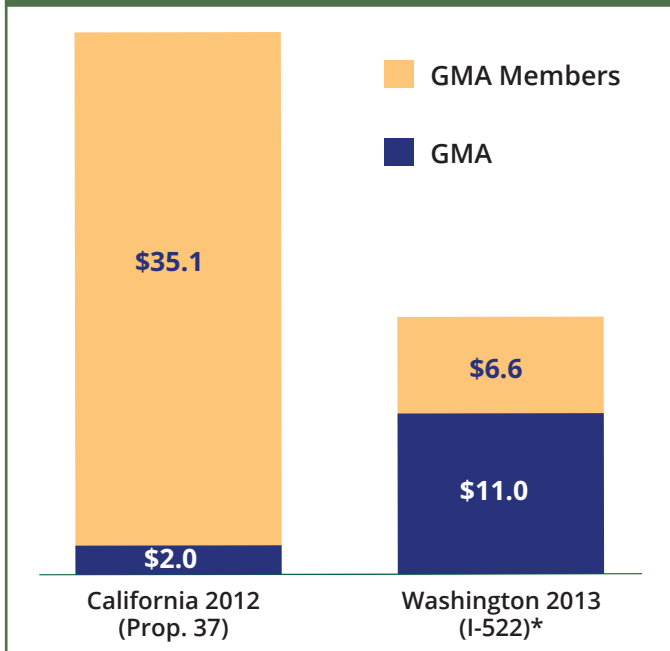
The food industry pulled out their checkbooks yet again to defeat the 2013 Washington state GMO labeling initiative. But this time, the GMA was the biggest contributor to the opposition campaign by collecting donations from its members, effectively funneling and concealing the corporate opposition to GMO labeling. This was part of the GMA's effort to "combat certain threats and better shield companies from attack."¹³

Grocery Manufacturers Association 2012 Board of Directors

Name and Board Position	Corporate Affiliation	Total Company Contributions Against Labeling of GMO Foods*
Gary Rodkin, Chair	ConAgra Foods	\$2,004,951
Kendall Powell, Vice Chair	General Mills	\$2,099,571
William Cyr, Treasurer/Secretary	Sunny Delight Beverages Co.	\$170,247
Jeffrey Ansell	Sun Products Corp.	
J. P. Bilbrey	The Hershey Co.	\$879,350
J. S. Brown III	Bruce Foods Corp.	\$42,864
John Bryant	Kellogg Co.	\$1,113,000
Mark Clouse	Mondelez Global LLC	\$391,336
Sean Connolly	Hillshire Brands	\$368,675
Brian Cornell	PepsiCo., Inc.	\$4,838,366
James Craigie	Church & Dwight Co., Inc.	
George Deese	Flowers Foods Inc.	\$387,199
J. Alexander Douglas, Jr.	Coca Cola Co.	\$3,220,851
Brian Driscoll	Diamond Foods Inc.	
Stanley Dunbar	Moody Dunbar, Inc.	\$7,619
Gregg Engles	WhiteWave Foods Co.	
Jeffrey Ettinger	Hormel Foods Corp.	\$544,703
Tom Ferriter	Bush Brothers & Co.	\$23,565
C.J. Fraleigh	Shearer's Foods Inc.	\$36,656
Joseph Gallo	E&J Gallo Winery	
Robert Gamgort	Pinnacle Foods Group, LLC	\$441,525
David Geise	Furmano Foods	
William Gisel, Jr.	Rich Products Corp.	\$283,211
Paul Grimwood	Nestlé USA	\$2,989,806
Kenneth Guise, Jr.	Knouse Foods Cooperative	\$188,546
James Hannan	Georgia-Pacific LLC	
Melanie Healey	Procter & Gamble Co.	
Bradley Irwin	Welch Foods, Inc.	\$208,893
William Johnson	H. J. Heinz Co.	\$500,000
Donald Knauss	The Clorox Co.	\$57,155
Kees Kruythoff	Unilever	\$467,100
Christopher Lischewski	Bumble Bee Foods, LLC	\$472,965
Reid MacDonald	Faribault Foods Inc.	\$76,000
Apu Mody	Mars Food North America	\$498,350
John Morgan	Morgan Foods, Inc.	
Denise Morrison	Campbell Soup Co.	\$982,888
Gregory Page	Cargill, Inc.	\$381,522
Randy Papadellis	Ocean Spray Cranberries, Inc.	\$489,395
Clement Pappas	Clement Pappas & Co., Inc.	\$130,547
Christopher Policinski	Land O'Lakes, Inc.	\$298,178
C. Larry Pope	Smithfield Foods Inc.	\$683,900
Garry Prince	Bimbo Bakeries USA	\$560,360
Richard Smucker	The J. M. Smucker Co.	\$904,978
Thomas Stokes	Tree Top, Inc.	\$110,600
Gregg Tanner	Dean Foods Co.	\$428,503
W. Anthony Vernon	Kraft Foods Group	\$2,000,500
David West	Del Monte Foods Co.	\$799,777
Alan Wilson	McCormick & Co., Inc.	\$396,569
David Yanda	Lakeside Foods, Inc.	
Kevin Hunt	Ralston Foods, Inc.	

* Total contributed to defeat GMO labeling initiatives in California (2012) and Washington state (2013).

GMA and Members' Opposition to GMO Labeling Initiatives (in millions)



* In Washington, many GMA members donated to a GMA fund that contributed to the opposition.

SOURCE: Food & Water Watch analysis of Washington state Public Disclosure data and MapLight California election data.

While that approach may have helped protect GMA members from public backlash, it potentially ran afoul of Washington election laws. Washington state sued the GMA for allegedly illegally bundling corporate campaign contributions and failing to disclose the donors that opposed the I-522 GMO labeling initiative.¹⁴ The GMA eventually disclosed its members' contributions, but in January 2014 it filed a countersuit challenging the constitutionality of Washington's campaign finance laws.¹⁵

After years of costly controversy over labeling in the states, it might seem that the food industry would want to make this issue go away and to give consumers what they want: more information about what they're eating. Instead, the GMA is asking the federal government to prevent states from labeling GMOs. In 2014, *Politico* leaked a GMA legislative plan to allow only voluntary GMO labeling (undercutting momentum for mandatory labeling) and to prohibit states from implementing GMO labeling laws if they're not identical to the voluntary federal framework.¹⁶ And to add insult to injury, the GMA even wants to allow GMO ingredients in foods bearing a "natural" label, a currently undefined and unregulated marketing term.¹⁷

Front-of-Package Nutrition Labels

Consumers rely on nutrition labeling to make decisions about the foods they feed their families. But the current nutrition fact-panel labels on the back of food packages are confusing, and many food manufacturers place marketing gimmicks on the front of the packaging that suggests nutritional information

that can be misleading.¹⁸ The Prevention Institute found that the majority of the manufacturers' front-of-package nutritional marketing information was of questionable value to consumers.¹⁹

In 2011, the GMA spearheaded an industry-led voluntary approach to front-of-package nutrition labeling that would include calories, saturated fat, salt and total sugar as well as give manufacturers the ability to highlight positive ingredients (calcium, potassium, fiber, etc.).²⁰ The GMA voluntary system would allow manufacturers to somewhat deceptively highlight healthful nutrients in less-than-healthy foods, such as the calcium in ice cream or fiber in sugary cereal.²¹

The GMA's coordinated voluntary approach, including a \$50 million marketing campaign, appeared to be an effort to deter federal efforts to set standards for these labels.²² The GMA dismissed the need for a federal standard for front-of-package labeling, countering that consumers "want to make their own judgments, rather than have government tell them what they should or should not eat."²³

Many consumer groups, public health experts and even the FDA have recommended or considered a standardized and simple front-of-package labeling scheme like a traffic light or numerical scale that would allow consumers to assess the overall nutritional quality of what they were buying.²⁴ But the GMA's efforts have apparently stalled efforts to develop a commonsense and standardized front-of-package labeling system.

Marketing to Children

In the last decade, the public has pressured the food industry to rein in their marketing to children in the wake of drastic increases in childhood obesity. Considerable research has shown that the foods that are most heavily advertised on Saturday morning children's television programs are in direct contrast to dietary guidelines, and these foods tend to have high levels of fat, sugars and salt.²⁵ Responding to the pressure and preempting regulatory guidelines, the GMA, along with other food manufacturers and advertising trade organizations, co-founded the Alliance for American Advertising in 2005 to defend the First Amendment rights of the junk food industry, fight efforts to limit food marketing to children and promote industry-proposed voluntary guidelines as opposed to government oversight of marketing to children.²⁶

Even when three government agencies came together in 2011 to establish an Interagency Working Group on Food Marketed to Children that released voluntary guidelines for industry self-regulation, the GMA lobbied heavily to keep the guidelines from being finalized.²⁷ In 2011, the GMA's vice president said that "there's no bigger priority for the food sector" than scuttling the children's advertising voluntary guidelines.²⁸ Public health organizations, the Federal Trade Commission and the vast majority of the 29,000 public comments supported the Working Group's proposal, but industry pressure trumped public health and Congress prevented the process from being completed.²⁹

Trade Agreements and Country-of-Origin Labeling

The GMA adamantly supports free trade agreements in order to purportedly increase grocery exports. But the fine print in these trade agreements allows big business to undermine vital public health, consumer protection and environmental safeguards as supposed “trade barriers.” The GMA supports using free trade deals to weaken food import inspection, prevent countries from considering consumer preferences in food policy, increase imported ingredients like vegetables (that compete with U.S. farmers)³⁰ and block taking a precautionary approach to untested ingredients and chemicals.³¹

Consumers feel the impact of this global deregulatory effort at the supermarket. For example, international trade deals have been used to justify the attack on the U.S. country-of-origin labeling (COOL) for meats, produce and seafood. Although the overwhelming majority of consumers (87 percent) want to know the source of their food,³² the GMA supported a 2004 bill to replace mandatory COOL (included in the 2002 Farm Bill) with a voluntary labeling system.³³ The GMA opposed mandatory COOL in the 2008 Farm Bill as well.³⁴ In 2011, the GMA opposed “any efforts to expand existing Country of Origin labeling rules.”³⁵

Conclusion

Trade associations such as the GMA wield too much power and influence on our food system and the policies that shape it. To counteract them, the food movement needs to focus not just on shopping better but also on taking back our government from such pervasive corporate influence. To get involved in the fight for GMO labeling, protecting country-of-origin labeling or blocking new corporate free trade agreements, go to www.foodandwaterwatch.org.



Endnotes

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