Vote on Proposition 37 in California
May Decide the Future of Food Labeling

The Annual Meeting & Speaker’s Conference on November 13 will review whether GMO labeling won or lost and what it means for the future of farming and food ingredients.

Of the 11 initiatives on California’s November 6th ballot, Proposition 37 – dubbed, “The California Right to Know Genetically Engineered Food Act” – has garnered the most attention. If passed, the California law would require manufacturers to label all food items that contain genetically engineered ingredients. Californians have been treated to a multi-million dollar media battle on top of the already onerous general election cacophony. Hollywood stars, scientists and concerned food companies are loudly vying for and against labeling foods with genetically modified organisms (GMOs).

In July 2012 the initiative was put on the ballot and initial polling done by USC/Los Angeles Times indicated 61 percent of registered voters favored the initiative and 25 percent opposed, with a hefty 14 percent undecided. The latest poll, done three weeks before the election, indicated 44 percent for and 42 percent against, a statistical dead heat.

Proposition 37 could have far-reaching implications for Minnesota-based food companies and agricultural producers. Brandon Castillo will discuss the California Campaign at the 2012 Minnesota Agri-Growth Council Annual Meeting and Speakers Conference to be held on Tuesday, November 13th at the Minneapolis Convention Center. Castillo and his firm, Bicker, Castillo & Fairbanks Public Affairs, are the lead consultants working on behalf of the No on 37 campaign to defeat the measure. In addition, Lori Marco, vice president of external affairs and general counsel at Hormel Foods, will speak from a food company perspective as to the implications of GMO labeling.

Opponents of the initiative say that putting a label on foods with genetically modified ingredients unfairly implies that there is something wrong, when labeling is already regulated at the federal level. It’s estimated by the American Grocers Association that over 70 percent of packaged foods contain a GMO, so the impact is huge. Many opponents maintain the proposed law is riddled with inconsistencies and exceptions so as to make it scientifically invalid, (for instance restaurant food is exempt, as is grain used in brewing and meat production). They say it favors “special interests” in some California food sectors.

Proponents, sponsored by the organic food movement, use a “right to know” argument and have relied on emotional television appeals using celebrities and ordinary people making wildly unfounded claims about the health risks of GMOs.

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The Minnesota Agri-Growth Council is an advocate for the state’s food and agriculture industry. Founded in 1968, the Council is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that represents the shared interests of its 200-plus members, which include food and agriculture businesses, organizations and producers, as well as the service industries that support them.

Company: AgCountry Farm Credit Services
Website: www.agcountry.com
Location: Headquartered in Fargo, ND

AgCountry Farm Credit Services is an independently owned and locally governed lending institution that provides credit and financial services to more than 12,000 farmers and ranchers in 18 counties in eastern North Dakota and 25 counties in northwest and west central Minnesota. Offices are maintained in 27 locations throughout the territory. AgCountry also provides agribusiness loans and leases in 35 states nationwide.

AgCountry is a part of the Farm Credit System, a $180 billion nationwide network of cooperative financial services institutions that serves rural America. Each is independently owned and operated by their member-owners. The primary goal of Farm Credit System institutions is to provide farmers, ranchers and agribusinesses with access to competitive lending and financial services.

The Farm Credit System just celebrated its 95th anniversary in 2011. Established by President Woodrow Wilson in July of 1916, the Farm Credit System was created to fill the need for long-term agricultural credit. Today, the system serves nearly 500,000 borrower-owners in all 50 states and Puerto Rico.

At AgCountry Farm Credit Services, we work hard to meet the unique financial needs of farmers, ranchers and agribusinesses by providing competitive credit and financial services products with more options, great flexibility, competitive rates, local decision-making and personalized service. Some of our products include Farm Loans, Leasing, Farm Accounting, Tax Planning and Management, Insurance, Succession and Retirement Planning, and Appraisals.

Q & A with Eric Vinje, Assistant Vice President of Marketing Communications:

How is AgCountry Funded?
AgCountry receives loan funds and vendor services from AgriBank, located in St. Paul, Minnesota. AgriBank is cooperatively owned by Farm Credit Services associations in 15 Midwest states.

What are the key trends affecting your organization?
Volatility in the commodity markets is one of the bigger trends affecting the industry today, and producers are becoming more and more savvy about how they market their crop. The days of ‘harvest the crop, then sell it’ are long gone. While our producers are growing their current year’s crop, they find themselves marketing both the previous and current year’s crop, while at the same time working on purchasing inputs for the crop that will be grown in the coming year. It’s a complex business.

What are your legislative priorities?
At AgCountry, we support initiatives we feel are good for agriculture and rural Minnesota. We favor initiatives that:

• Support adequate funding and a broader scope to Rural Finance Authority programs
• Increase the availability of financial services to rural areas
• Support the MDA Small Loan & Diversity Program Initiative

• Strengthen state incentives to encourage risk management education
• Promote transportation system improvements and rural infrastructure development
• Create more rural health care options while containing costs
• Support producer and consumer education of new technologies, products, and processes
• Promote science-based regulation and responsible use of ag inputs
• Promote best management practices while protecting private property ownership rights

The Minnesota Agri-Growth Council is an advocate for the state’s food and agriculture industry.

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Staff
Daryn McBeth, president
Tony Mondry, program manager
Krystal Caron, communications director
The 2012 Minnesota Agri-Growth Council Annual Meeting and Speakers Conference will be November 13 at the Minneapolis Convention Center. To attend this event, please register online at agrigrowth.org/AM or complete this form and return via fax (651.905.8902) or mail (408 St. Peter Street, Suite 20, St. Paul, MN 55102).

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Billing Information:
Select One: □ Invoice me □ Pay by credit card below □ Enclosed is my check, payable to MN Agri-Growth

Your Name: ____________________________________________________________

Organization Name (Name to appear in Program): __________________________

Mailing Address: ________________________________________________________

City: __________________ State: ___________ Zip: __________________

Phone: __________________ Fax: ______________ Email: __________________

Credit Card: __________________ Expiration: ___________ Security Number: ___________

Visa or Mastercard Only

Please note note that cancellations will not be accepted after November 1st and “no shows” will be billed.
Agri-Growth Conference: November 13, 2012

8:30 a.m. — Welcome, Reports and Elections
9:30 a.m. — Richard Berman, Center for Consumer Freedom, Berman & Company
10:30 a.m. — California’s Proposition 37: How GMO labeling won/lost and what it means for the future of farming and food ingredients in the U.S. and elsewhere; Brandon Castillo, Bicker, Castillo & Fairbanks Public Affairs and Lori Marco, General Counsel, Hormel Foods Corporation

Annual Members Meeting: Members Program

Noon Luncheon and Welcome — Agri-Growth Chairwoman Kristin Weeks Duncanson, Duncanson Growers
2012 Distinguished Service Award Presentation
Keynote Remarks:
• David Redfield, Senior Vice President, Northern Plains Division, Walmart
• Michael Taylor, Deputy Commissioner for Food, U.S. Food & Drug Administration
2:15 p.m. — Global Ag Economy Outlook; Dr. Michael Swanson, Chief Ag Economist, Wells Fargo
3:15 p.m. — Global Sustainability, Corporate Social Responsibility and the Role of the Food and Agriculture Industry; Dr. Jason Clay, Senior VP, Market Transformation, World Wildlife Fund, accompanied by Dr. Jonathan Foley, Director, Institute on the Environment, U of M
• Audience discussion and Q&A led by Steve Peterson, Director Sustainability Sourcing and CSR, General Mills
4:15 p.m. — Plenary Panel: “Reviewing the 2012 Election from State and National Perspectives”
• Jennifer Duffy, Assistant Editor, The Cook Political Report
• James Hohmann, National Political Reporter, Politico
• Dr. Lawrence Jacobs, Director of the Center for the Study of Politics and Governance, U of M
• Blois Olson, Minnesota Political Pundit, Fluence Media, and Editor, The Morning Take
5:30 - 7:00 p.m. — Reception