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GMA sued over GMO ballot donations

Moms for Labeling files lawsuit alleging trade group is 'illegally' concealing contributions to fight I-522

by Sustainable Food News
September 19, 2013



an order for early discovery.

A lawsuit filed against the Grocery Manufacturers Association is alleging the trade group is "illegally" concealing donations from the nation's largest food makers and retailers big food retailers to fight I-522, Washington state's ballot initiative to require labeling of foods made with genetically engineered ingredients.

The plaintiffs, a Washington State group called Moms for Labeling, filed the lawsuit Tuesday in Thurston County Superior Court, where a judge granted

The lawsuit said Washington, D.C.-based GMA acted as a political committee to solicit money in the form of a voluntary special assessment to fund the No on 522 campaign. GMA has so far contributed over \$2.25 million to defeat I-522.

The complaint said GMA "should be disclosing which member companies are giving money to fight the initiative." Washington law requires organizations raising money for ballot measures need to register as a political committee.

"These moms are fighting for transparency in food and in this campaign. They oppose out of state corporations concealing GMO ingredients in their foods and concealing their efforts to buy this election," the complaint said. "They have an existing and genuine interest in ensuring that out of state lobbying groups and corporations do not use illegal tactics to oppose I-522 or deceive the voters."

Monsanto Co., DuPont Pioneer and other opponents of I-522 have raised at least \$11 million to defeat the effort, the state's campaign finance disclosures reveal.

Just last week, the two biotech giants contributed \$7.7 million to the "No on 522 Committee" for advertising on the airwaves to convince voters I-522 is a bad idea.

The ballot measure "would require most raw agricultural commodities, processed foods, and seeds and seed stocks, if produced using genetic engineering, as defined, to be labeled as genetically engineered when offered for retail sale."

No on 522 has already spent \$1.66 million, according to the state's Public Disclosure Commission.

A similar GE food labeling ballot initiative in California called Proposition 37 was narrowly defeated last year after a coalition of the nation's largest food companies dumped \$46 million to defeat it. Supporters of Prop 37 raised just over \$9 million, not nearly enough to combat the deluge of television advertising that successfully persuaded voters to reject the measure.

So far, pro-labeling forces, led by the "Yes on I-522 Committee," has raised \$3.5 million, according to state records, and has spent \$837,688. The largest "Yes on I-522" contributor is Dr. Bronner's Magic Soaps. Other contributors include Stonyfield Farm, natural retailer

PCC Natural Markets, and iconic natural and organic brand Clif Bar.