



# News Release

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*“Connecting Cows, Cooperatives, Capitol Hill, and Consumers”*

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## **Vermont Dairy Farmer Testifies Before Senate Agriculture Committee on Federal Regulation of Biotechnology**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Joanna Lidback, a dairy farmer from Westmore, Vt., told a panel of Senators on Capitol Hill today how important biotechnology is to her family’s farm, explaining that the efficiencies of using biotech crops help sustain the business she and her husband own.

Lidback spoke before the Senate Agriculture Committee, outlining several reasons why she supports the use of genetically-modified crops, and does not support her home state’s mandatory GMO-labeling law.

“I am disappointed that my home state of Vermont passed a mandatory GMO-labeling law that is set to take effect next year,” she said before the committee.

Lidback, who runs a 200-acre farm with her husband and two sons, [testified](#) on behalf of dairy cooperative Agri-Mark, Inc., a member of the National Milk Producers Federation and the National Council of Farmer Cooperatives.

The Senate hearing Wednesday marked the fourth time in the past year that expert testimony to a congressional committee affirmed the overwhelming scientific consensus showing that genetically modified organisms (GMOs) are safe for consumers and the environment. Senators also heard how vital biotechnology is to modern agriculture, as farmers strive to produce higher yields on less land, using fewer pesticides, limiting irrigation and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Lidback said that crops grown through this method are vital to sustaining her dairy, as they save her money and allow her to adequately care for her animals at all times of the year. Other farmers can tailor their growing method to what best suits their resources and soil requirements, she added.

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“Biotechnology enables us to lessen the environmental impact that growing can have because less fertilizer and pesticides are used, which in turn means fewer times [on a tractor] over the soil with equipment, thereby cutting down on soil erosion and compaction as well as carbon footprint. Yields are typically higher and there are fewer weeds, growing a cleaner, more abundant crop,” she explained.

Lidback said non-GMO feed costs almost double than what she pays per ton now, which would cost her an extra \$48,000 a year if that were her only option. Shipping and storage costs would also have to be factored in.

Lidback also spoke about the environmental effects of GMO crops. Through biotechnology, she said, farmers have been able to decrease the amount of pesticides they use – dispelling a common myth associated with GMOs.

“Biotechnology has brought us even more solutions for things like drought tolerance, improved nutrition, disease resistance and medical advancement, to name a few. It also could help us answer other issues such as citrus greening, American Chestnut tree blight, and maybe even human diseases like Ebola,” she said.

This is not Lidback’s first time before Congress. She testified on the same topic in front of the House Agriculture Committee back in March, and again before a House subcommittee in July 2014.

Lidback said the Vermont law is confusing and unnecessary for both producers and consumers. The law applies to some food and not others; the labels could confuse non-Vermont residents; and it will cost families more money at the check-out line. Taxpayer money is better used elsewhere, she argued.

“I generally do not believe in paying the higher premium for these foods because they provide no added nutritional or other health benefits and environmental benefits are arguable,” she concluded.

#### **About Agri-Mark**

Agri-Mark, with \$952 million in 2013 sales, markets more than 300 million gallons of farm fresh milk each year for more than 1,200 dairy farm families in New England and New York. The cooperative is headquartered in Methuen, Mass., has been marketing milk for dairy farmers since 1913, and actively represents their legislative interests in the Northeast and in Washington, D.C.

Agri-Mark owns three cheese and dairy product manufacturing facilities in Vermont and New York State and has a butter/nonfat powder plant in Massachusetts. Agri-Mark has also invested in operations to manufacture and market valuable whey proteins globally while also marketing fresh fluid milk from its local farm families to the region's largest dairy processors.

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The National Milk Producers Federation (NMPF), based in Arlington, VA, develops and carries out policies that advance the well being of dairy producers and the cooperatives they own. The members of NMPF’s cooperatives

produce the majority of the U.S. milk supply, making NMPF the voice of more than 32,000 dairy producers on Capitol Hill and with government agencies. For more on NMPF's activities, visit our website at [www.nmpf.org](http://www.nmpf.org).