

Separate shelves for GM foods is now law

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THE HOUSE yesterday voted into law a bill making it compulsory to display genetically-modified (GM) foods on separate shelves in shops and supermarkets.

GM foods and foods containing GM ingredients, will now be sold with a prominent sign stating clearly that these are GM foods, or food containing GM ingredients.

The law provides for GM labelling in three languages (Greek, English and Turkish), and stipulates hefty fines for non-compliance.

It was passed by unanimous vote, despite earlier concerns of opposition from vested interests, such as commercial quarters.

The passage of the law was welcomed by the Green Party, which has been pushing for tighter GM regulation.

"This caps our efforts of nine years," said Greens MP George Perdikis. The government bill passed yesterday was largely based on a legislative proposal drafted by Perdikis. He subsequently withdrew the legislative proposal as the government document has precedence.

Under EU legislation each member state is free to display these foods as it sees fit. The bloc also has tough labeling standards.

Earlier in the afternoon, the Greens had organised a gathering outside parliament where they also reiterated calls for Cyprus to be made a GMO-free zone.

Hundreds of administrative districts across the EU have declared themselves GMO-free.

A previous attempt to pass the separation bill was stopped in its tracks in 2005, after pressure from the US government.

The US embassy had at the time expressed concern that the separation of GM and non GM foods threatened to stigmatise GM foods, most of which are produced in the US.

The issue blew up some five years ago when President Demetris Christofias was still AKEL leader and House Speaker when Washington "strongly urged" him "unofficially" to make sure such a bill never got through parliament or it would damage Cypriot-US relations.

A 2008 review published by the UK's Royal Society of Medicine noted that GM foods have been eaten by millions of people worldwide for over 15 years, with no reports of ill effects. And a 2004 report from the US National Academies of Sciences stated: "To date, no adverse health effects attributed to genetic engineering have been documented in the human population." There have, however, been no epidemiological studies to determine whether engineered crops have caused any harm to the public.