

Highly processed ingredients like high fructose corn syrup have little to no traceable DNA in them, and so the U.S. Department of Agriculture (which regulates food labels) doesn't require manufacturers to add a label to indicate those bioengineered foods.

And then there's that word—"bioengineered." The USDA only just announced how they would require manufacturers to disclose GM ingredients, though the law was enacted back in 2016, and the new rules don't use the term "GMO" or even "GM." Instead, they opt for "BE" or "bioengineered," perhaps to avoid using loaded terminology. "I'm not sure how much people will know that term," says Dominique Brossard, a communications professor at University of Wisconsin-Madison specializing in life science issues like GMOs. "I don't think it's going to be very easy for people to find out [which foods are genetically modified]."

"I think this was actually the intent of the 2016 law," says Glenn Stone, an environmental anthropologist who studies the GMO debate. "[It] was passed just in time to overrule a state-level law that was taking effect requiring that GMO foods have clear labels." Vermont had previously passed legislation that would have fined companies for failing to label food containing GM ingredients, including highly processed ones like corn syrup (though it excluded cheese, which often relies on a genetically engineered enzyme called chymosin). It also specified that the labels would include the phrase "genetic engineering," not "bioengineered."