

The money behind the face of the No on 37 Coalition By Camille Phillips

The biotech companies and food manufacturers threw their weight behind the No on 37 Coalition en masse this week. The coalition opposes an initiative on California's November ballot that would require labeling on any food containing genetically modified ingredients.

On Tuesday, 79 donations were [filed with California's Secretary of State's office](#), totaling \$23.7 million. Prior to August 14, the campaign had received less than \$2 million total.

[According to the Associated Press](#), much of the money will be spent on ads and mail warning consumers that voting yes on the initiative will make the cost of groceries go up.

In addition to making groceries more expensive, members of the coalition also argue that requiring labels implies a health concern where none exists.

"Proposals that would require labeling of GM ingredients where there is no meaningful difference in nutrition or safety risk misleading consumers into thinking products are not safe when in fact they are," said biotech giant Monsanto's director of corporate affairs, Tom Delscher, in an email to Harvest.

"There is reason to be concerned about misleading consumers – some of the leading proponents of mandatory GM labeling have been outspoken in proclaiming that GM products are not safe, which is simply not true," Helsen said.

Jeffrey Smith is one of the outspoken proponents to which Helsen is referring. Smith is the author of two books on the dangers of genetically modified food. He is currently traveling through California on a speaking tour in support of the Yes on 37 campaigns.

"It's absolutely irresponsible of the government not to require labeling of genetically-modified foods," Smith told Harvest last week in a phone interview.

The anti-labeling campaign is officially called No on 37: Coalition against the Deceptive Food Labeling Scheme, Sponsored by Farmers and Food Producers, but the main contributors to the campaign are all biotech companies and food manufacturers, not farmers and ranchers.

Five of the top six biotech companies (Monsanto, DuPont, Dow Agrosiences, Bayer CropScience and Basf PlantScience) have donated more than a million dollars each, with the sixth, Syngenta, donating more than \$800,000. Monsanto and DuPont both donated more than \$4 million.

Rounding out the top ten contributors are four big names in food manufacturing: PepsiCo, Nestle, Coca-Cola and Conagra Foods, all donating more than \$1 million.

[The campaign's website](#) also downplays the role of biotech companies and food manufacturers. Clicking through to the [Who We Are](#) page brings a long list of farm bureaus and growers associations, followed by chambers of commerce and food associations. At the bottom of the list lies one entry for science: the Council for Biotechnology Information.

Read the small print at the bottom of the screen, however, and new names appear. "Major funding by Monsanto Company, E.I. DuPont de Nemours & Co., Grocery Manufacturers Association (GMA) and more than 40 food company members," reads the text in the space generally reserved for website copyright information. [A link to a list of donors follows.](#) The only way to find the donor page is via this link. It is not one of the tabs at the top of the page.

The Grocery Manufacturers Association and the Council for Biotechnology Information were the first to file donations to the coalition back in April. But individual biotech companies didn't file donations until July, after the end of the reporting period at the California Secretary of State's office.

Despite the appearance of hiding, perhaps the lack of emphasis on the major companies funding the campaign is simply a matter of putting the best face forward. After all, a biotech company would hardly be in favor of an initiative that implies their products are unsafe. But farmers and consumers give a more friendly face to the campaign.

Tom Helscher certainly didn't try and hide Monsanto's connection to the campaign in his email to Harvest.

"Monsanto is part of the growing coalition of California family farmers, doctors, scientists, food producers, grocers, small business, labor and taxpayer groups opposed to Proposition 37," Helscher wrote. "For details about the onerous initiative, please contact the *No on Proposition 37 coalition* media contact, Kathy Fairbanks."

Granted, the email was sent on August 14, the same day Monsanto filed its \$4.2 million donation with the Secretary of State.