# US Grocery Manufacturers Association (GMA) Found Guilty of Massive Anti-Labeling Corporate Donation Coverup

*The Grocery Manufacturers Association (GMA) was found guilty on Friday, March 11, of violating the "spirit and letter" of the state of Washington's Campaign Finance Disclosure Laws by attempting to shield the identities of the corporations that dumped millions of dollars into a campaign to defeat a GMO food labeling initiative that was gaining steam across the state.*

The guilty verdict was handed down by the Washington Superior court. The case was originally filed in October 2013 by the Washington Attorney General Bob Ferguson after the AG's office became aware of the fact that the GMA was hiding the identities of anti-labeling donor corporations.

According to Ferguson, the GMA raised $14 million dollars from its members for the "Defense of Brands" fund far above and above the dues regularly charged to members. Over the course of the anti-labeling campaign the GMA was the largest single-donor to the "No on 522" initiative, spending $22 million dollars to stop labeling.

Initiative 522 would have required the labeling of GMO food, seeds, and seed products across the state if it had passed. After receiving the $14 million dollars in special solicitations from its members, the GMA donated $11 million of that money to the "No on 522" initiative.

However, instead of listing the money as coming from the corporations who donated it, only the GMA was listed. This was done in order to protect the identities of the individual companies from laws requiring proper disclosure and to effectively allow the GMA to act as the spearhead and the scapegoat for a collective corporate assault on food freedom.

According to Fortune Magazine, internal documents, memos and even meeting notes showed that the Defense of Brands fund was indeed designed to conceal the identities of GMA members.

One example is a meeting note which said,

> State GMO-related spending will be identified as having come from the GMA, which will provide anonymity and eliminate state filing requirements for contributing members.

Thurston County Superior Court Judge Anne Hirsch [stated that](),

> In enacting the Public Campaign Finance Laws, the people of Washington directed that they be interpreted liberally, to promote transparency and full disclosure to the voters. By its actions creating the [Defense of Brands] account, the GMA violated the spirit and letter of Washington's Public Campaign Finance Laws.

The court also ruled that a factual dispute remains in regards to whether or not the GMA's violation of the law was intentional. Therefore, a penalty was not determined and will not be administered until there is a ruling on the intentionality of the GMA's actions.

In 2013, the top ten contributors to the GMA's Defense of Brands Account saw Pepsi Co, Nestle USA Inc., and the Coca-Cola company as the top three contributors.

Below are the top [10 contributors]() to the Defense of Brands fund and the amounts that they contributed in 2013:

1. PepsiCo: $2.696 million
2. Nestle USA, Inc.: $1.751 million
3. The Coca-Cola Company: $1.742 million
4. General Mills: $996,000
5. ConAgra: $949,000
6. Campbell Soup: $441,000
7. The Hershey Company: $413,000
8. J.M. Smucker: $401,000
9. Kellogg: $369,000
10. Land O'Lakes: $332,000

With such massive amounts of money being spent to prevent labeling initiatives like Initiative 522, one might begin to wonder whether or not, at some point, it might become more financially feasible for a number of these companies simply to move toward non-GMO ingredients. In fact, such an idea should be a consolation to pro-labeling activists as well as a guiding concept for their march forward. While Initiative 522 failed, it required millions of dollars in corporate funds to defeat it. Activists must now return to the battle field, not deflated – but invigorated.

Pro-labeling attempts must continue every election cycle. Eventually, either the measure will pass – or corporations will find it cheaper to comply with the activists' demands. The message should be clear to the corporations: we will have GMO labeling whether you like it or not.

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