

Astroturf Against 522

All of the money for No on 522 came from the Grocery Manufacturers Association and five chemical and biotechnology corporations: Monsanto, DuPont, Dow, Bayer, and BASF Oh, and a few individuals. Out of over \$22 million raised, five real Washington state residents contributed a whopping \$600. But that's not what you might think if you surfed onto the campaign website.

There the group provides long lists of farmers, ranchers, scientists, organizations, farm groups, and individuals who support its position. This strategy is known as astroturf, because it aims to resemble an authentic grassroots campaign, just as astroturf is made to look like actual grass.

“The Largest Amount of Money Ever Concealed in an Election”

Here's a question, though: Who are the Grocery Manufacturers of America (GMA)? And why did behemoths like Coca-Cola and PepsiCo appear at first to stay silent on 522, when they poured millions into fighting Prop 37 in California last year?

The No on 522 campaign succeeded in raising the largest amount in Washington State history to fight a ballot initiative. But GMA's portion broke a record of its own; it was “the largest amount of money ever concealed in an election,” according to Washington State Attorney General Bob Ferguson. It turned out that Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, Nestle, General Mills,

and all the rest of the largest food companies in America weighed in on the 522 fight after all – only this time, they tried to do it secretly.

Last year, during the Prop 37 battle, these large food manufacturers took a beating in the press for their open opposition to labeling the genetically engineered ingredients in their products. This time around, they still wanted to donate, but did not want their reputations harmed for doing so. They all donated to a fund within GMA, and GMA, in turn, gave the money to the fight against 522.

All went well until a group called Moms for Labeling sued to find out GMA's donors. The suit was thrown out, and then Washington's Attorney General filed his own suit. The story was well-covered by public health watchdog Michele Simon, who explained that the secret fundraising actually broke the law, and the tactic was specifically intended to “better shield individual companies from attack.”

Grassroots for 522

The irony was that No on 522, with its phony “grassroots” support and corporate mega-funding, overshadowed an actual grassroots campaign. The \$7.8 million raised by Yes on 522 came from 15,000 individual donations. About 97 percent of these contributions were under \$1,000 as of late October, and even the donations above \$1,000 came from a broad donor base of 150 different organizations, farms, cooperatives, corporations, and individuals.

Although a large share of the funds raised came from out of state, quite a bit came from Washington.

For example, one of the largest donors was PCC Natural Markets, which gave \$100,000. PCC is a natural food cooperative with 49,000 members in the Greater Seattle area. Another \$160,000 came from the Washington-based natural food company Nature's Path.

Scanning down the donor list, one finds many entries like this:

- A Waterville, WA farmer gave \$5,000
- A Seattle musician gave \$2,500
- An Oakville, WA farmer gave \$1,000
- A Port Townsend, WA homemaker gave \$1,000
- A Mercer Island, WA retiree gave \$1,000

The Yes on 522 campaign was an example of grassroots democracy in action, and the 522 fight showed how easily a handful of wealthy corporations can trample on democracy.

Fortunately, thanks to successful enforcement of Washington's laws, at least these companies didn't get to shield their reputations as well.

The well-funded battle may leave some wondering why food companies are so desperate to conceal from consumers the ingredients they are putting in our food.

Effort to Stop Genetically Engineered Trees in the U.S. TAKES OFF!

BY ANNE PETERMANN

*Executive Director of Global Justice Ecology Project
Coordinator of the Campaign to STOP GE Trees*

“We have no control over the movement of insects, birds and mammals, wind and rain that carry pollen and seeds. Genetically engineered trees, with the potential to transfer pollen for hundreds of miles carrying genes for traits including insect resistance, herbicide resistance, sterility and reduced lignin, thus have the potential to wreak ecological havoc throughout the world's native forests.”

*Dr. David Suzuki,
renowned geneticist*

Gainesville, Florida

On Saturday, October 26th, members of an organizing tour put on by the Campaign to STOP Genetically Engineered Trees were thrown off of the University of Florida campus and threatened with arrest after their event there was unexpectedly cancelled. The tour, titled, “The Growing Threat: Genetically Engineered Trees and the Future of Forests,” was scheduled to present at U Florida on Monday the 28th, but only days before, the student organizing the event was informed that the room he had reserved had been cancelled. The tour participants were given several excuses for the cancellation, and when they tried to gain access to the building to ask about moving to a different room, they were confronted by campus security, evicted and



banned from the campus for three years.

Tour organizers believe this overreaction was due to the fact that in 2011, the University of Florida School of Forest Resources and Conservation and GE tree company ArborGen won a three-year, \$6.3 million grant from the US Department of Energy to develop GE Loblolly Pines for liquid biofuel production. On another Florida campus later in the week, the student organizer of the STOP GE trees event reported that she was pulled aside by the College Provost and warned that the FBI had been in contact about the inadvisability of hosting this tour.

But it is not only pines that are being engineered to produce biofuels, Duke Energy has funded research into genetically engineering American chestnut trees

to resist the blight that was introduced into the U.S. in the early 1900s and by the 1950s had killed off most of the four billion American chestnut trees that dominated eastern forests.

Duke Energy is interested in the opportunities afforded by the American chestnut for various corporate greenwashing schemes to promote false solutions to climate change. They plan to use American chestnut trees to “reclaim” former coal mining sites, which will help them comply with federal law while also allowing them to use the carbon stored by the trees as carbon offsets to avoid reducing their pollution. They can also use the starch-rich chestnuts from the trees to manufacture ethanol. American chestnuts are considered the equivalent of corn in production per acre.

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