

Organizing an Annual Town Meeting Campaign in Massachusetts

NOFA/Mass (January 2006)

- **Consult your town clerk.** Find out how to put an article (resolution) on the town warrant (agenda). Ask the town clerk or the selectboard secretary the following questions; When will the annual town meeting be held? Are there official forms that need to be used to submit an article? How many signatures are needed to put an article on the warrant?¹ What is the deadline for submitting an article? Should the proposed article be submitted directly to the selectboard at a regularly scheduled meeting? When does the selectboard meet?
- **Draft an article for the warrant.** Most articles include the following issues; a call for a local and state moratorium on further growing of GE crops, mandatory labeling, strict liability assigned to the commercial developers of GE foods and seeds and notification of elected state and federal representatives. Print copies of the complete article with spaces at the bottom for the signatures of registered voters in your town. Do not accept signatures of people who do not live in town or who are not registered. Do not put signatures on the back of article/signature sheet. Be sure to include the full language of the proposed article on every signature sheet. If you live in Massachusetts, contact the NOFA/Mass resource people listed below for assistance and advice.
- **Seek out others** in town that would like to help with the process. Collect signatures at the compactor, post office, stores, outside churches, or other places where people congregate. It is always a good idea to have a group of concerned citizens rather than just the organizer submit the resolution to the selectboard at their regularly scheduled meeting.
- **Educate yourself and others about genetic engineering.** You do not have to be a world authority on genetic engineering to speak to the issues at the annual town meeting. This agricultural technology is unregulated, uncontrolled and has fallen through the cracks of state and federal regulations. A state and national moratorium on the growing of GE crops needs to be instituted until such time as safety (health, food, agricultural, environmental) concerns are conclusively satisfied. NOFA/Mass can help your community set up film screenings (see inside packet) for a small -- or large -- group of active citizens.

¹ In most Massachusetts towns, the answer is usually that 10-15 signatures are required to put an article on the town warrant, but one should always ask first. Then, collect a few extra signatures in case there are any names from the first group of signatures that are not registered voters in the town.

- **Start a public outreach campaign.** Hold a public forum. This can be solely an informational meeting about genetic engineering, or presenters from both sides can be invited to speak at a town panel discussion prior to the annual town meeting. NOFA/Mass can also help you organize big events with public speakers who will frame the issue in very informative and inspiring way. Call to invite friends and interested people to these public events. Personally speak to farmers or call them and invite them to the public meetings. Farmers need to be informed and not isolated from the process. Write letters to the editor of your local newspaper. Notify other media. Develop a strategy to deal with potential opposition at the public meetings and at the annual town meeting.
- **Get the vote out on town meeting day.** Call your friends and relatives. Ask them to call their friends and relatives and so on. Make sure there are people at the town meeting who will speak in favor of the resolution.
- **After the meeting.** Make sure the town clerk or selectboard secretary sent copies of the article to the town's elected officials as required in the article. All that is needed are copies of the letters that were sent. Contact Ben Grosscup (contact below) to report the results.

Questions? Help? In Massachusetts, contact these NOFA/Mass resource people with questions about your GE campaign.

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