

pressdemocrat.com

This is a printer friendly version of an article from www.pressdemocrat.com
To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

[Back](#)

Article published - Nov 2, 2005

Foes of GMO ban redo fliers to fix error

Mailers misquoted health officer; measure won't affect vaccines currently available for human use

By [Bob Norberg](#)
and BLEYS W. ROSE
THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

Opponents of a proposal to ban genetically modified organisms are revising their campaign literature after Sonoma County's public health officer complained she was misquoted in a flier sent to voters.

Measure M wouldn't affect vaccines currently available for human use, Dr. Mary Maddux-Gonzalez said, which is contrary to a statement attributed to her in mailers sent by the Family Farmers Alliance.

Maddux-Gonzalez said the Department of Health Services isn't taking a position on Measure M but wanted to set the record straight.

"The Sonoma County Department of Health Services wants to make accurate information available to all residents of the county to help them make an informed decision on this measure," she said in a statement released Tuesday.

Rob Muelrath, a campaign consultant for the Family Farmers Alliance, conceded that the mailer was wrong and said a new one going out in the next three days would omit the statement about vaccines.

Muelrath blamed the Sonoma Index-Tribune for the error, saying the newspaper dropped the word "not" from a sentence in an Oct. 21 editorial, changing the meaning of a statement by Maddux-Gonzalez that had appeared in The Press Democrat a week earlier.

She had said: "The impact (of Measure M) on human vaccines is uncertain. It does not appear that it would limit vaccines currently in use, but there are several in development that work on replication of a virus in the body."

Muelrath said the campaign didn't check the statement before putting it in the mailer. "The last thing I want to do is mislead the public," he said Tuesday.

Measure M, which would impose a 10-year moratorium on GMOs in Sonoma County, was drafted primarily as an agricultural initiative but the availability of vaccines has become an emotional issue during the campaign.

If it's approved, neither side disputes that Measure M could ban some human vaccines that are in the research stage.

Maddux-Gonzalez said there are vaccines under development that rely on "transgenic manipulation technology," and the moratorium "could potentially make it unlawful to sell or distribute" them.

These, she said, include vaccines for avian influenza, HIV and West Nile virus infections.

Maddux-Gonzalez also noted Measure M contains a provision giving the Board of Supervisors authority to change the ordinance by a unanimous vote, so it could exempt human vaccines in the future.

Maddux-Gonzalez's statement contradicting the anti-Measure M mailers was issued at the request of GE-Free Sonoma, the sponsors of the initiative. Campaign officials said their offices were inundated with calls from people fearful they wouldn't be able to obtain cancer and HIV drugs if Measure M is approved.

"This is the issue that the campaign seems to be turning on," said Dave Henson, the Occidental Arts and Ecology Center director who authored the measure. "It is terrifying people and it is a lie being repeated in yet another mailer."

Although Measure M deals primarily with the question of whether GMOs are safe and reduce pesticide use in agriculture, the effect of a ban on organisms in human and animal vaccines has taken on added significance because the impact would be broader than the handful of farmers who grow GMO corn in the county.

When the Redwood Empire Veterinary Medical Association weighed in two weeks ago on the question of animal vaccines, it sparked fierce debate among veterinarians and pet lovers. In the end, the association opposed Measure M, but proponents dispute the group's conclusion that organisms in some feline leukemia, dog distemper and horse vaccines can be replicated within animals and then transmitted.

© The Press Democrat. For copyright information view our [User Agreement](#)
