

Foes of Measure M question campaign funding

Occidental center backing GMO ban denies state Farm Bureau allegation of outside donations

By BLEYS W. ROSE
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The dispute over funding sources of the Measure M campaign reached a new level Wednesday with opponents claiming national groups are secretly funneling money into the local campaign, a charge that measure supporters adamantly deny.

The California Farm Bureau, which has contributed \$10,000 to defeat the ban on genetically modified organisms, filed a complaint this week with the state Fair Political Practices Commission questioning whether three national groups in a GE-Free Agriculture coalition with the Occidental Arts and Ecology Center are helping fund the Measure M campaign. Officials of the center, which is Measure M's primary backer, said they have not received a cent from the national groups.

"That is an awful lot of plants to sell," said Lex McCorvey, executive director the Sonoma County Farm Bureau.

Dave Henson, center director and chief Measure M spokesman, acknowledged the center accounts for about three-quarters of campaign contributions, explaining money comes from plant sales, educational courses, special-event rentals, individual donations and foundation grants.

"We cultivate a diverse income stream, like any nonprofit should," Henson said.

Measure M opponents allege in their six-page complaint filed this week that three groups contributing a total of \$125,000 to similar GMO ban campaigns in Mendocino, Marin, Butte and San Luis Obispo counties are likely providing the Occidental center with funding.

Those groups are the Center for Food Safety of Washington, the International Forum of Globalization of San Francisco and the Organic Consumers Union of Minneapolis, none of which is listed in Sonoma County elections records as having given money to Measure M.

State Farm Bureau officials acknowledge that their complaint, coming just a week before the election, is unlikely to be investigated any time soon by the FPPC. However, they said they expect GE-Free advocates to attempt other county-by-county GMO bans, regardless of the outcome in Sonoma County.