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## **Measure targeting altered crops inspires filing of rival lawsuits**

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Rival campaigns fighting over a Sonoma County ballot issue banning genetically altered crops are off to a contentious start, filing dueling lawsuits Thursday over ballot measure wording.

Friends and foes of Measure M, which would place a 10-year moratorium on growth of genetically modified organisms, filed challenges in Sonoma County Superior Court that quarreled over verbiage in ballot measure arguments.

The GE-Free group supporting the moratorium took it a step further, challenging the county's fiscal impact statement as well.

The county auditor estimates implementation of a GMO moratorium will cost almost \$113,000 in staffing the first year, that soil contamination cleanup will cost up to \$86,000 an acre and that investigating a single complaint could add up to \$10,000.

"All of these projected costs are based on a misreading of the initiative and the law involved, and a misunderstanding of the basic science involved," said Dave Henson, GE-Free campaign director.

The county administrator's office has defended its analysis, saying the cost estimates are based on a strict interpretation of the proposed GMO moratorium.

The GE-Free group said opponents of the measure are wrong in claiming genetically altered crops reduce pesticide use. It also said opponents would mislead voters by claiming support from "every major farming organization" in the county.

Meanwhile, measure opponents led by the Family Farmers Alliance argued that supporters are wrong in claiming the moratorium would not affect biotechnology research and would not limit use of vaccines on people and animals.

"We do have problems with their ballot argument," said Rob Muelrath, the alliance's campaign consultant.

The dispute is likely to end up before Superior Court Judge Knoel Owen, who has until Sept. 12 to rule on ballot measure wording before the county elections office submits the voter's pamphlet for printing. The county voter's pamphlet is mailed to registered voters in early October.

Measure M is the only countywide issue on the Nov. 8 election ballot.

Janice Atkinson, county assistant registrar of voters, said the clash over ballot wording puts pressure on county officials and rival campaigns to resolve differences in time for printing and distribution.

"The cross-filing of complaints is a little out of the ordinary, but we have been in court over ballot wording in every election in the past five years," Atkinson said. "It seems it is now part of the process."