

DANGER: Genetically Modified Organisms

Genetically modified organisms (GMOs), including GMO food crops, are a danger to our environment, our health and our agricultural industries.

An ANU study last year found that experimental animals were sickened by CSIRO's GM field peas. This study called into question the rigour of Australia's Food Safety Authority (FSANZ) assessments of GM foods. FSANZ spokesperson Lydia Buchtman said FSANZ did not conduct trials involving feeding animals or people GM foods. FSANZ used product data from GMO companies and compared it with data on conventional foods which were 'substantially equivalent' before approving and registering food products.

Australia's GMO regulatory regime is administered by the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator (OGTR). OGTR is a pro-GMO agency which assesses proposals from corporations and other government agencies (e.g. CSIRO) to release GMOs into our environment, either for 'trials' or for commercial growing. The OGTR approves almost every application it receives, usually on the basis of risk and safety information presented by the corporations themselves.

The Howard government wants to stop State and Territory governments from being able to declare moratoriums on genetically modified crops. Here is the current State-by-State situation:

- **Victoria:** Moratorium until 2008: but nine GM canola and indian mustard sites in the Horsham and Hamilton area during 2005 were exempt from the law and permitted to harvest seed for export.
- **South Australia:** Moratorium until 2008: but ten GM canola sites in the Mt Gambier area were used during 2005 to grow GM canola for seed export to Canada.
- **NSW:** Moratorium until 2008: but excluding the GM cotton areas in Northern NSW centred around Narrabri.
- **ACT:** Moratorium until 2008 at least.
- **WA:** Moratorium until March 2009 at least: and expected to continue.
- **NT and Qld:** No moratoria (but NT has a ban on commercial cotton growing which prevents ongoing cotton industry push for GM cotton in NT).

International Day Opposing GM

Thousands of people in 72 countries celebrated the global resistance to genetically manipulated organisms (GMOs) in food, crops and stock feed on April 8, 2006. The international day follows outrage at the World Trade Organisation's decision to restrain European governments from protecting their farmers and other citizens from the threat of GMOs. 258 protests took place in Australia, Bolivia, India, Benin, South Africa, Togo, Hawaii, Austria, the USA and Europe. 44 local events were organized in Poland. In France, 100 farmers and activists occupied the Monsanto seed depot in Trebes in the week following April 8, saying they would not stop until France is declared a GM free zone. In Sangareddy, Andhra Pradesh, 1,000 women marched across the city, finishing with a public meeting where they took an oath never to allow GM crops into their farms or homes. For full reports of the global resistance to GM, see

<http://altercampagne.free.fr/>

True Food Guide

The 4th edition of the True Food Guide from Greenpeace, which details how to avoid buying GM food, was launched recently in Sydney and widely distributed. True Food Guides are a great asset, helping shoppers make informed decisions. Download the latest True Food Guide from

www.truefood.org.au

Gene Technology Act Review a farce

In March 2006 ECNT appeared before the Gene Technology Act Review Panel when it traveled to Darwin. In its final report, issued April 27, the review panel ignored most of the 280 submissions it received Australia-wide and recommended weaker laws on Genetically

Manipulated Organisms (GMOs). The report backs the GMO industry, despite many flaws in the regulatory system and its implementation which we asked the panel to fix. For instance, they rejected our request for a stronger precautionary principle and strict liability for GMO damage. To end state moratoria, they also accepted the GMO industry's push to develop 'a national framework for co-existence for non-GMO and GMO crops to address market considerations'.

Government Grants for Gene Technology Studies

On Friday April 28, 2006, Agriculture Minister McGauran announced Commonwealth Government grants of \$851,890 for gene technology studies designed to justify fast tracking genetically manipulated crops and foods into Australia. This cash cow for corporate interests is the opening salvo in another wasteful taxpayer-funded government/industry PR campaign to trash the GMO-free values held by most Australian family farmers and shoppers. These scarce resources are needed for much more important and useful research and development priorities, such as safe, sustainable and valuable organic agriculture.

For instance, the study of economic threats to organic farming from GMO contamination is just window-dressing, as the biggest challenge of GMO canola would be to conventional GMO-free growers who do not have the organic industry's closed-loop marketing and identity preservation systems to protect them.

Like the North American experience, Australian farmers are now discouraged from saving and replanting their own seed. If GMO canola arrives the commercial GMO-free varieties will soon become unavailable. Choice would end but there would be no escape. This is exactly what has happened in Canada.

To join the global resistance to GMOs in your area, call GeneEthics Australia on 1300 133 868 or email info@geneethics.org or visit: <http://www.geneethics.org>

And also visit this great site: **www.non-gm-farmers.com**