

Media Release

Food Labelling Review must back GM food labels

Melbourne, Thursday April 29, 2010: Gene Ethics will give evidence to National Food Labelling Review hearings today in Melbourne. We will ask for all foods made using genetic manipulation (GM) techniques to be labelled, without any exemptions.

“Truthful, transparent and accurate information must be on all food labels, with promotion, advertising and health claims banned from this scarce space,” says Gene Ethics director, Bob Phelps.

“Labelling should satisfy every shoppers' right to know how processed food ingredients were made and what's in the products. Free access to full information is required to optimise the functioning of free markets. So misleading, or deficient labelling is a restraint of free trade. So we call on free marketeers in government and business to embrace full labelling.

“The Inquiry's issues paper falsely claims GM foods are labelled, ignoring the exemptions in Standard 1.5.2 that allow most foods made with GM to be unlabelled – GM vegetable oils, starches and sugars; processing aids and additives; restaurant meals; meat, milk, eggs, honey etc. from animals fed GM feed; and a 1% threshold for 'accidental' GM contamination.

“We call for all foods made using GM techniques to be labelled, without exception.

The Panel's paper also says: ‘caution needs to be exercised in order that the development and application of these and other innovative technologies (GM; nanotechnology; irradiation; etc.) are not unduly inhibited.’ “But putting the promotion of new, untried food technologies ahead of safety and of shoppers' right to know how food was made is unethical and unacceptable,” Mr Phelps says.

GM foods are among the novel 'Foods Requiring Pre-Market Clearance' in Food Standard 1.5. Novel, GM and irradiated foods must undergo Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) pre-market health and safety assessments (not testing) as they contain materials and/or use manufacturing processes that have no history of safe use in the human food supply. “This is another reason to label.

“The Codex Alimentarius international food standards require irradiated foods to be labelled with the process of production. This sets a strong precedent for the products of all other new and untried technologies and processes - such as GM and nanotechnology - to also be labelled. Their novelty and developing safety science means these foods pose unique risks to health that FSANZ acknowledges. It amends data sheets on these foods with new scientific evidence as it is published.

“The jury is still out on GM crop impacts and GM food safety as Scientific American (Editorial, August 2009) and Nature Biotechnology (volume 27 number 10 October 2009) also say. They report that GM patent owners refuse to supply the seed and approvals for independent research and prevent negative evidence from being published. The onus is on the owners of GM crops, animals and microbes to show their products are safe and to label them, but they fail both tests,” Mr Phelps concludes.

Food Standards Code: <http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/foodstandards/foodstandardscode/>

Review paper: <http://www.foodlabellingreview.gov.au/internet/foodlabelling/publishing.nsf/Content/pubsreports>

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Eating in the Dark Rally

Noon to 1pm Thursday April 29, 2010

Outside the Telstra Corporate Centre

1/242 Exhibition St Melbourne

(cnr Exhibition & Lonsdale Sts)

**Protesters will wear red blindfolds and
carry packages of processed foods
suspected of containing GM soy,
corn, canola or cottonseed,
unlabelled**

**At 12.45pm, a statement signed by
200 chefs and a GM labelling petition
with over 30,000 signatures will be
presented to the Review panel**