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MEDIA RELEASE

Calls to fully label GM and other novel foods

Submissions to the labelling review close on Friday

Thursday, November 19, 2009

Public interest groups, scientists and concerned mothers ask the national food labelling review for comprehensive labelling of food ingredients that have no history of safe use. These include Genetically Manipulated and irradiated foods, and containing or processed with nanomaterials.

“Novel foods should be fully labelled because present knowledge about them is incomplete and they have not been finally assessed as safe,” says Bob Phelps, Director, Gene Ethics.

“Gene Ethics’ submission calls for all novel Foods Requiring Pre-Market Clearance by our food regulator Food Standards Australia NZ (FSANZ), under food standard 1.5, to be fully labelled as they may entail long term or unforeseen hazards,” he says.

“Novel, GM and irradiated foods are required to undergo pre-market safety assessments because they contain materials and/or are manufactured using processes that have no history of safe use in the human food supply.

“Yet, FSANZ does none of its own testing, is selective in the evidence it considers and heavily relies on company data that is not peer reviewed,” Mr Phelps says.

“GM labelling is more urgent now as Australian GM canola oil – from our first GM food crop – enters our food chain for the [first time](#) this year.

Most GM-derived food ingredients are exempt from labelling, including GM vegetable oils, starches and sugars, processing aids and additives, flavours and foods where GM food is ‘unintentionally’ present at up to 1%. The meat, milk, eggs, cheese, honey etc. from animals fed GM feed are also unlabelled for GM.

The Institute of Health and Environmental Research submission, edited by IHER director and epidemiologist Dr Judy Carman, says labelling plays a crucial role in monitoring and tracing the effects of eating GM foods. “Not one of the 55 or so genetically modified crops permitted in the Australian food supply has undergone a long-term animal feeding study to compare the health effects of the GM food to its non-GM equivalent. None have undergone human health testing,” the submission says. The IHER submission also says that the FSANZ Board should be restructured to include more experts in medicine, public health, nutrition and food-borne disease, who are independent of commercial food companies.

Mothers Are Demystifying Genetic Engineering (MADGE) says in its submission that most mothers are concerned about GM foods. MADGE co-founder Jessica Harrison says, “Mothers want to feed their families food they can trust. Why should we have to be detectives every time we look at a package?”

Submissions and enquiries can be made by email to FoodLabellingReview@health.gov.au or through the Department of Health until close of business Friday November 20, 2009.

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