

Gene Ethics | News Media Alert

Melbourne, February 10 2010: The Indian Government has banned the growing of genetically manipulated (GM) eggplant. The ban will remain until independent scientific studies satisfy the public and experts that the crop has no long term negative impacts on human health and the environment.

"This is a stunning victory for India's precautionary regulation of GM crops and foods," says Gene Ethics Director Bob Phelps.

"Their fair and democratic approach to all sides of the GM debate is a shining example.

"It contrasts starkly with the one-eyed stance of the Commonwealth, NSW, Victorian and WA governments that actively promote GM technology and its products while ignoring the concerns of most shoppers, here and around the world.

"The South Australian, Tasmanian and ACT governments are listening to the community and we congratulate them on extending their GM crop bans. They have unique marketing opportunities by remaining GM-free, in response to customer preferences.

"Influencing the Indian decision was the whistle blown by Tiruvadi Jagadisan, a former Monsanto Director, who publicly disclosed that the company had faked scientific data to gain regulatory approvals.

"This confirms recent charges laid in Scientific American and Nature Biotechnology magazines, that the GM industry withholds its products from independent research and does not allow negative scientific findings to be published.

"It also casts doubt on the validity of assessments made by the Australian regulators of GM crops and foods - Food Standards Australia NZ (FSANZ) and the Office of Gene Technology Regulator (OGTR)," he says.

"Australian regulators base their approvals for GM canola, cotton, soybean and corn varieties on the same company-generated evidence as that discredited overseas. Many GM foods that are approved and on supermarket shelves here were judged to be unsafe by regulators in India, Europe and other countries.

"Australia's regulatory regime is not precautionary enough and a thorough overhaul is needed urgently so that applicants are required to submit genuinely scientific and independent evidence for exhaustive assessment.

"We call on Federal Ministers Roxon and Butler to begin a review of Australia's GM regulatory regime immediately," Mr Phelps concludes.

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