



MEDIA RELEASE

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For immediate release

A joint media release of Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance, MADGE and GM-free Consumers Network

Australia's food sovereignty at risk from Monsanto's part acquisition of InterGrain

In a move that places it at the centre of Australia's food supply, multinational biotech giant Monsanto has acquired 19.9% of InterGrain, the company that produces seed for 40% of all wheat grown in Australia. This deal allows Monsanto, which owns 25% of all commercial seed and 90% of the world's traded genetically modified (GM) seeds, to insert their GM traits into the best varieties of Australian wheat.

The WA sale follows a tri-national agreement signed in May 2009 between Canadian, Australian and US wheat interests to develop GM Wheat, prompting a world-wide petition against its development signed by 233 farmer and consumer groups from 26 countries.

"This deal is to advance the private interests of Monsanto, contrary to the interests of ordinary Australians", said MADGE (Mothers Are Demystifying GE) spokeswoman, Fran Murrell.

"One concern is that farmers will no longer have the right to grow the very best seeds as non-GM varieties, as Brian Whan of InterGrain has indicated."

"It is more profitable for them to randomly alter the genome by adding a GM gene. This changes good non-GM varieties into GM varieties that can be patented. Farmers are at risk of becoming contract growers for Monsanto's supply chain", Ms Murrell added.

The Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance (AFSA) is calling for a public and democratic inquiry into the implications for Australian food security of the part acquisition of InterGrain by Monsanto, as well as the process by which GM canola was commercialised in Western Australia.

"Without democratic ownership of seed we are not in control of our food", said Nick Rose of the AFSA."

"The long-term implications of this acquisition, and of the growing pressure to commercialise GM varieties throughout the food system, are so serious that they demand a full, open and participatory public debate. Governments must not be allowed to sneak this technology in under the ruse of exemption orders", he added.

In other reaction to the Monsanto purchase:

Janet Grogan of the WA GM Free Consumers Network said: “Seeds bred over decades by Australian farmers and governments for our most basic food, bread, will be used by Monsanto to develop GM products for private profit that are undemocratically imposed in the face of global rejection by farmers and consumers.”

“The WA Network of Concerned Farmers and the general public were strongly against the commercialisation of GM canola early this year. Over 27,000 people signed a petition demanding that WA remain GM free. Of the 424 submissions to the 2003 GM Crops Free Areas Act review, 90% wanted GM bans to remain”, Ms Grogan said.

“The WA Upper House passed a disallowance motion against the first GM canola trials, but the executive (Agriculture Minister Terry Redman) signed an exemption order allowing the trials to proceed.”

“MLA Mick Murray raised a second disallowance motion, saying farmer opposition to GM canola had grown to 50%. This Motion failed by the narrowest of margins (26-24) with abstentions, and after concessions were made to appease concerned MPs. The concessions never eventuated”, said Ms Grogan.

“To now have the WA government handing over our seeds to a multinational company with no public discussion or debate is a further trampling of democracy”, she added.

References, sources and additional material are available on request through the following:

Contacts:

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