



For Immediate Release: 15 July 2010

## **Twitter breaks open secret GM corn approval**

Twitter was the key to exposing our food regulator's (FSANZ) secret approval of the chemical laden GM corn "Smartstax". FSANZ did not put the crop through a safety assessment, nor notify the public of the crop's approval.

The crop, jointly owned by Monsanto and Dow, has eight pesticide related GM genes:

- Six genes generate insecticidal toxins within the plant to kill insects, five of these in every cell of the plant, including the corn cob, and
- Two genes prevent the plant from dying from being sprayed with two different types of weed killers.

[MADGE has sought the opinion of international biosafety expert Jack Heinemann, Professor of Genetics and Molecular Biology at the University of Canterbury in New Zealand on the safety assessment of these types of stacked GM crops (see below).]

"The GM crop sent shockwaves through Twitter last year when it was approved for planting in Canada without being assessed for safety by Health Canada<sup>i</sup>" said MADGE's Madeleine Love. "We're familiar with 2 or maybe 3 gene crops, but an 8-gene unassessed crop was something else."

"I expected that FSANZ would be asked to approve the crop to provide Monsanto and Dow with a trade outlet to Australia and NZ, and to prevent the risk of Monsanto and Dow being sued by Australia or NZ for unapproved GM contamination."

"Six months later news of the large scale introduction of Smartstax seeds to US farmers flew round Twitter, and I knew it would enter our food supply soon."

"Usually FSANZ notifies the public when a new GM crop is going to be assessed for safety. While MADGE regards the assessments and review as inadequate, at least the public is notified. But I heard nothing until it dawned on me that FSANZ wasn't going to tell us and I started to investigate:

- There was nothing on the FSANZ website about Smartstax and it was not on the FSANZ list of approved crops (Table to Clause 2, Standard 1.5.2)<sup>ii</sup>
- I re-read the Health Canada story and found the technical names of the four GM crop lines from the Institute of Science in Society (I-SIS) website<sup>iii</sup>
- Then I went to the industry Agbios website and used the technical crop name (MON89034xTC1507xMON88017xDAS-59122-7) to access the approval listing. The crop was not listed as approved for food in Australia<sup>iv</sup>
- I noted all of the crop's GM genes, and then went through each of the individual FSANZ approval documents to check that the genes matched those in the four crops<sup>v</sup>

"At that point I was certain about how FSANZ would've acted, and contacted them. Three days later I received a reply, saying that Smartstax was an approved crop for food in Australia.<sup>vi</sup>"



---

i Health Canada was the target of whistleblower microbiologist Dr Shiv Chopra's book "Corrupt to the Core", which detailed his time at Health Canada. It was launched to federal members of parliament in Canberra last year, where Dr Chopra told MADGE that we could expect the same from our authorities.

<http://www.cban.ca/Press/Press-Releases/CFIA-s-Irresponsible-Rubber-Stamping-of-New-GE-Corn>

<http://www.inspection.gc.ca/english/plaveg/bio/bt/smartstaxe.shtml>

ii [http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/\\_srcfiles/Standard\\_1\\_5\\_2\\_GM\\_v117.pdf](http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/_srcfiles/Standard_1_5_2_GM_v117.pdf)

iii <http://www.i-sis.org.uk/SmartstaxMaizeAMedelyOFTransgenes.php>

iv [http://cera-gmc.org/index.php?evidcode=MON89034+x+TC1507+x+MON88017+x+DAS-59122-7&hstlDXCode=&gType=&AbbrCode=&atCode=&stCode=&coIDCode=&action=gm\\_crop\\_database&mode=Submit](http://cera-gmc.org/index.php?evidcode=MON89034+x+TC1507+x+MON88017+x+DAS-59122-7&hstlDXCode=&gType=&AbbrCode=&atCode=&stCode=&coIDCode=&action=gm_crop_database&mode=Submit)

v <http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/consumerinformation/gmfoods/gmcurrentapplication1030.cfm>

vi We suggest contacting FSANZ through its CEO.

vii Bio: Jack Heinemann is a professor of genetics and molecular biology in the School of Biological Sciences at the University of Canterbury and is a senior adjunct scientist at GenØk – Centre for Biosafety in Tromsø, Norway. Jack was previously a staff fellow at the US National Institutes of Health Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. He holds a double undergraduate honours degree in biochemistry and molecular biology from the University of Wisconsin – Madison and a PhD in molecular biology from the University of Oregon.

Jack has been a member of the American Society for Microbiology (ASM) his entire professional life and is also a member of the New Zealand Society of Microbiology. He received the ICAAC Young Investigator Award from the ASM in 1993 and was the recipient of the New Zealand Association of Scientists Research Medal in 2002. He was appointed to the UN Roster of Biosafety Experts in 2005. Jack and his research group publishes extensively in the internationally peer-reviewed scientific literature. He recently served the UN FAO as author of their study paper on transgene flow (approved by an intergovernmental panel) and a consortium of international agencies as a lead author and synthesis author on the International Assessment of Agriculture Science and Technology for Development Report (adopted by an intergovernmental panel).

His main research interests are microbial genetics with particular fascination with how genomes emerge from mobile collections of genes, as exhibited in rapidly evolving traits such as antibiotic resistance, virulence and metabolic pathways. This interest has awakened him to human behaviours that can influence the evolution of such traits and the responsibility for academics to exercise their role as critic and conscience of society on these matters.