



For Immediate Release: 4 November 2010

Get Smart about Smartstax

Only 39% of Australians have heard that plant genes can be modified “by introducing the genes of a bacterium”, according to a recent survey commissioned by the Department of Innovation, Science and Technology. *

Further, the survey found that only 32% of Australians found such an application “acceptable”.

The survey didn’t find out what percent of people **actually know** they are eating such GM food, nor the percentage who would find it acceptable that they are.

Here is the news to majority Australia:

- The GM soy that contaminated infant formula contained **a gene derived from a bacterium**, as well as broken pieces of same gene scattered around the scrambled inclusion site in the plant.
- The GM “Smartstax” corn that FSANZ decided not to assess for safety contains **eight genes derived from bacteria**. In respect of the GM Smartstax corn, six of the genes make insecticidal toxins within the plant. A wide range of insects will die if they eat the corn. The other two genes allow the GM corn to be sprayed with weedkillers that would kill most plants.
- The GM canola that has been planted in Australia contains **two genes derived from bacteria**. These allow the plant to survive being sprayed with weedkiller.
- Various GM cottons approved for planting in Australia contain **one or more genes derived from bacteria** to kill insects and/or resist weedkiller.
- In its submission to the Federal Labelling Review, the Australian Food and Grocery Council acknowledged that if all GM ingredients were required to be labelled, most food items on supermarket shelves would need to carry a GM label.

“The Australian population has been unwittingly consuming this food in increasing amounts for 13 years. Surely it’s our basic right to know what we are eating and to choose not to eat GM” said MADGE’s Madeleine Love.

“There is no reason to assume that because FSANZ is allowing GM to creep into our food unannounced that it is by consequence harmless. FSANZ does no tests of its own, and typically there are no independent safety studies before GM food is approved.”

“MADGE has reviewed the ‘safety data’ Monsanto sent on its GM canola crop. Monsanto self-reported that it failed to comply with the basic lab fraud prevention standards of Good Laboratory Practice in 15 of the 30 studies. It reported full compliance in only three.”

MADGE spokesperson Fran Murrell said “Our children are eating food that we are told is safe by companies with long track records of making products that deform, poison and kill people (eg Monsanto & Dow).”

"We are now looking into the data of Monsanto's GM soy crop that contaminated infant formula."

MADGE has put up an information page on its website about the GM Smartstax crop discussed on the ABC's 7:30 report last night.

<http://www.madge.org.au/smartstax-update.php>

The Department of Innovation, Science and Technology has a role to promote investment in new technologies.

Contact:

Madeleine Love 0447 762 284

Fran Murrell 0401 407 944

* The people responding to this question were answering a question about “applications of biotechnology” rather than explicit “genetic modification”. In addition the wording “Modifying the genes of plants to produce food” may have given the impression that this biotechnology application would allow new food production, rather than a line such as “Modifying the genes of food plants..” a more correct message to indicate a change to existing food. The survey had an education bias and the actual awareness numbers may be lower.