

# Mothers take up fight against GE

By Bert van Bedaf

WOULD you mind if your child tucked into genetically engineered or modified food?

The chances of this happening are greater than you think. If you don't mind, then there is nothing to worry about.

If you are like mothers Jessica Harrison, of Wonthaggi, and Becky Banks, of Kongwak, the battle is ahead of you. They won't have a bar of GE.

The two women belong to Mothers Against Genetic Engineering (affectionately known as Madge), a group that is growing in numbers and influence worldwide.

In New Zealand recently, members took action at a local supermarket.

They filled shopping trolleys with foodstuffs, took them to the checkout and then demanded to see the manager and get assurances that the food did not contain GE.

When they were told this could not be done, they left their shopping at the checkout and walked out.

In the United States, the campaign against GE or GM is in full swing.

"Genetic engineering is the largest food experiment in the history of the world. We are the guinea pigs," one anti-GE group, Mothers for Natural Law, posted on its website.

"Is genetic engineering safe for you and your family? Is it safe for the environment or the future of mankind? No long-term studies have been done.

No one can answer these questions."

The group claimed there were "40 varieties of genetically engineered crop approved for marketing in the United States".

"As a result, 60 to 70 per cent of the foods on your grocery shelves contain genetically engineered (GE) components.

"Genetically engineered foods contain substances that have never been a part of the human food supply.

"They are not subjected to rigorous pre-market safety testing and they are not labelled."

Jessica and Becky agreed. "We need labelling now, so that consumers can choose what they want to eat."

Following federal approval of the release of two GM canola strains in 2003, former State Premier Steve Bracks announced a four-year moratorium on the commercial planting of genetically modified canola on May 12, 2004. It is set to expire on February 29, 2008.

GM food crops are banned in all states except Queensland.

The State Government announced an independent review on GM canola planting on May 22 this year, chaired by eminent scientist Professor Sir Gustav Nossal, with panel members Merna Curnow, of the Grains Research and Development Corporation, and Christine Forster, a western Victorian farmer experienced in rural issues.

The panel will receive

public submissions until August 17. Jessica and Becky made their submission in Melbourne last Wednesday, August 8.

"Basically, we made three key points," Jessica said. "We are saying GE is bad for the Australian economy. Australia is known to be clean and green and GE will damage our export reputation.

"Mothers throughout Australia are concerned for their children's health. We are not prepared to feed GE food to our children.

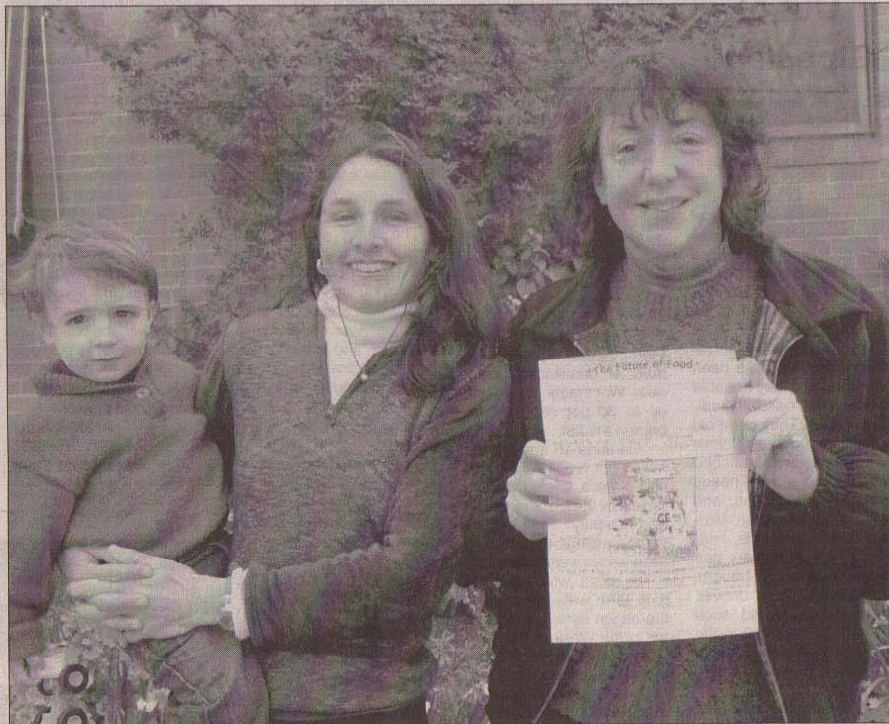
"Once GE is introduced it is irreversible. Before anyone jumps into GE, it must be 100 per cent certain that it does not adversely affect humans, animals and the environment."

"If the ban (moratorium) is lifted, it will cause strife between neighbouring farmers," Becky said. "Canola crosses readily. It knows no fences. It easily blows across fences."

The women said several milk companies, such as Murray Goulburn, would require proof that milk delivered to them does not contain GE.

"Dairy cattle are commonly fed canola and companies will demand proof that the animals are not fed genetically engineered canola," Becky said.

The women believed it would increase the cost of canola to farmers, because suppliers would be required to conduct testing and labelling. Because there is no GE or GM labelling of food in supermarkets, consumers know very little of what they are buying and



**GE fight:** Becky Banks, with son William, and Jessica Harrison are Mothers Against Genetic Engineering, who have organised a public meeting on the subject at the Dakers Centre on August 24.

eating, Jessica said vegetable oils and cotton oil could have been produced by GE. "When I buy a tin of tuna I make sure it is in olive oil," she said.

Becky said she bought organic produce to ensure her two-year-old son William would grow up "a healthy, GE-free boy".

The Canola issue has

taken on even greater significance following comments in a confidential Federal Government paper reported in the Melbourne press on Sunday.

According to the report, "genetically modified crops pose no danger to humans or the environment and should be given the green light". GM crops will allow

Australian farmers "to compete with the rest of the world".

GE crops and food will be discussed at a public meeting at the Dakers Centre, Leongatha, on Friday August 24, 7pm. Entry is by donation. A film will be shown followed by a panel discussion, chaired by South Gippsland shire

councillor David Lewis. Speakers will include Tarwin Lower organic beef farmer Shane Blundy, executive director of Gene Ethics Bob Phelps, Dr Richard DiNatale, a public health specialist and Greens candidate, and Jessica. For more details, call her on 0407 307 231, or Jackie on 5683 2411.