



# GE Free New Zealand In Food and Environment Newsletter July 2007

\* Please note that some articles have been abbreviated in order to meet size constraints \*

## Legal Challenge to GE Brassicas- Your Help is needed

We need your help to raise money to challenge the Environmental Risk Management Authority ERMA's approval of GE brassica field trials. The trials lack common sense, and we believe the process is flawed based on points of law. We urgently need donations large or small to fight this approval to "ge" our vegetables

Please forward your donations to:  
GE Free NZ PO Box 693, Nelson  
Or pay directly into GE Free New Zealand in Food and Environment, Inc. account at the National Bank Wellington-No. 0609960521358 00

A flyer/ poster is enclosed to help you spread the word. Please write letters to your local paper to publicize the case.

Crop and Food - GE Brassicas broccoli, cauliflower, cabbages and forage kale trials were approved despite many submissions against the application. GE free NZ attended the hearing in Christchurch. Experts Dr. Judy Carman, epidemiologist and Professor Joe Cummins gave strong evidence on our behalf by phone. Yet despite many strong submissions ERMA have seen fit to approve this trial citing only minimal benefits.

The brassicas get a Bt (Bacteria thuringiensis) gene inserted into the genome, which results in toxins being expressed in the cells of the plants, to kill caterpillars. The plants, which are presumably intended ultimately as food, have **never** been tested as a human or animal food. Similar toxins introduced into cotton have caused the deaths of cattle and sheep eating Bt cotton crop residues in India.

## GE Brassica Trials - High Court Papers Filed GE Free NZ PR 25.6.07

After much consideration papers were filed in relation to errors in law relating to approvals for field trials of GE Brassica. GE Free NZ has decided that the flawed decision-making cannot go unscrutinised.

Unfortunately there is no other legal redress for those making public submissions to challenge what appears to be an approach by ERMA that justifies why an experiment should go ahead; instead of considering all points and then finding solutions to best address them.

ERMA received 940 submissions asking that the application be declined in light of known dangers to the New Zealand economy, public and animal health making a commercial release at any stage in the future impossible to envisage.

The ERMA hearing was initially disrupted as people protested the farcical nature of the process and expressed concern that ERMA would approve the application regardless of submissions. The submitters provided well researched scientific evidence that was not previously included in the application. However key concerns were judged "negligible".

"The lack of necessary research protocols and experimental procedures over the ten years of the trials means that little knowledge of value will come out of the field tests," says Claire Bleakley from GE free NZ ( in food and environment). "We ask anyone concerned to support us and donate to this challenge."

## GE foods in our diet

The bulk of the food supply from supermarkets and restaurants, contain GE foods, which have infiltrated our food supply. If people buy processed foods some GE ingredients eg. Oil, soya lecithin maize syrup, etc will be unlabelled.

Over 70% of processed foods have GE food content. Without any meaningful testing, GE crops have infiltrated the food supply over the past 10 years.

## Support Companies with a GE Free Policy

One of the best ways we can keep food supplies clear of GE ingredients is to support companies which are committed to a GE Free Policy.

We need to encourage them to include a statement or logo on the packaging so that people know they have a GE-free policy.

**A new website has been set up to help companies and consumers:**

[www.gefreepolicy.com](http://www.gefreepolicy.com)

## What you can do:

- Ask manufacturers to commit to a GE-free policy and label their products using the information and logos from the site.
- Explain to people that government policies to allow contamination mean there can be 'no guarantees' for some ingredients.
- Look out for the next issue of the Greenpeace True Food guide, and double-check manufacturers' policies by contacting them.

Further scientific reports indicating harm to rats tested on GE foods have come to light recently after being withheld by Monsanto.

New Zealand's joint food regulations with Australia, mean approvals are made there, thus it becomes nearly impossible for GE Free NZ to retrieve information of the assessments approvals are based on. Recently we asked for documents pertaining to the Monsanto study to be released to us only to be informed that the study had previously been returned to Monsanto and no copy kept.

Recent scientific evidence shows there are still concerns about the effects of GE foods on health and next month an international coalition of scientists will present evidence at the European Parliament asking for a worldwide ban on GE crop releases.

Science is no longer the unbiased savior of mankind that it was once held to be. Unfortunately it has been shown that scientists, and even scientific Institutes are "bought" by corporate bodies seeking regulatory approval and many scientific reports are changed prior to publication to minimise any "negative evidence".

GE proponents will tell you that there have been significant increases worldwide in the acreage of GE crops. The reasons for this are not only that it makes for 'easy' farming in a time of falling prices for food commodities due to the fact that most GE crops are herbicide resistant, Round Up Ready or pest resistant (such as Bt crops) but also because so many farmers have been contaminated by patented GE crops and then taken to court for growing it without a patent licence. Farmers struggling with world prices don't need court cases to further impact any profit that may result from their hard work. For the consumer Round Up ready crops mean increased herbicide residues and worse still gut bacteria can reactivate the herbicide in the digestive system, as well as these crops causing reproductive and endocrine disruption.

Bt crops designed to kill pests particularly root borer in maize were first utilised in the late 90s.

One US unapproved Bt variant known

as Starlink – developed as an animal food-entered the food supply then, and people became ill prior to the crop being traced and product withdrawn from supermarket shelves. This incident featured heavily at the Royal Commission of Inquiry on GM and as a result the New Zealand Food Safety Authority (NZFSA) was set up under MAF.

GE Free New Zealand has been a part of the Consumer Forum for several years but recently we were told that GE was not a part of their remit. After being informed by several parties that it had been part of the reason for their inception, GE issues have remained on the agenda.

Recently however an unapproved (for human consumption) GE rice variant again entered the US food supply and was exported intermingled with non GE crop. No attempt has been, or is intended to be made by the NZFSA citing minimal exposure by the public. Despite repeated requests to remove this food from the shelves; they refuse to act.

We are at present asking NZFSA to look at GE alfalfa from the US. Much seed imported into NZ is from the US and seed importation protocols have been set up by MAF to try and prevent its entry. The growing of GE alfalfa in the US has gone to court where the courts have ordered the USDA to halt approval of all new field trials of GE crops until thorough environmental reviews are conducted and ruled that past approvals are illegal. Plaintiffs are asking for an injunction on sales and planting of GE alfalfa.

The culture at MAF over the years has been one of complacency towards GE from the beginning. Several years ago when Starlink began to contaminate maize growing in the US, we advised MAF that importation of seed from the US should cease, since this was considered impossible, we were asked for input into seed protocols.

Soon after the seed protocol was introduced "Corngate" occurred, an illegal contamination of maize seed. Around that time an audit in MAF showed up problems in their communication with ERMA with whom they have an Memorandum of Understanding with regards to GE contingency plans. Since then there

have been maize contamination incidents almost on a yearly basis - the most recent due to lax procedure by a member of MAF personnel and resulting in potential contamination of hundreds of hectares of farmland and negative impacts on farmers livelihoods. The farmers involved are still waiting for half the compensation after 4 months since no-one will accept full responsibility, and the roll-on effects to the economy of these areas will no doubt be felt.

### What we can do

Every outdoor trial of crops has the potential to contaminate. So far we have outdoor trials of pine trees and vegetables, potatoes, onions, cabbages, caulis, broccoli and kale.

With clear local policies in place we may be able to deter trials in our local areas, maintain our economy and protect the NZ food supply, environment and health of our communities. With local government elections due this year it is again time to ask prospective councilors about any concerns they may have and whether they will act on them if elected.

We need also to ask for a Liability Clause for any GMO release in our local areas and strict controls in policy to ensure the cost of mitigation will not fall on the ratepayers if ERMA approves any GMO release application which results in any pollution or damage, or MAF makes yet another gaffe.



GE cabbages/cauliflowers/broccoli and kale with Bt toxin expressed in every cell have not been tested either on human health or the environment.

**Outdoor trials should not go ahead.**

## **Former Crop & Food Scientist says GE Brassica field test**

### **approval lacked scrutiny 30.5.07**

A former Crop & Food GE scientist, Dr Elvira Dommissie, said today that proper scrutiny by ERMA of evidence would have prioritised the need for food studies over fund-wasting field trials.

ERMA has once again approved an application to field test GE crops, namely GE brassicas. This decision, which gives Crop & Food Research in Lincoln the go ahead, has angered groups with scientific and environmental safety concerns, who note the lack of scrutiny ERMA has shown in its decision.

At the public hearing in April this year, a number of scientific submitters with referenced evidence, stressed that it was important to first carry out rat feeding experiments with these GE crops to establish that they were safe to eat, according to Dr Elvira Dommissie of Soil & Health.

"One thing that needs to come through very clearly is the huge waste of public money if, at the end of ten years, rat feeding trials take place and the crops are found to be toxic or allergenic."

"This is quite possible, given the past record of other GE crops. We only have to look to Australia, where GE peas modified with a harmless bean protein produced immunological problems in mice.

The GE brassicas to be field tested at Lincoln are modified with a highly altered bacterial protein, which produces a pesticidal toxin. This is all the more reason to believe that such crops will be toxic or allergenic to mice or rats and ultimately humans and other animals."

Yet when asked about rat feeding experiments on National Radio Dr Mary Christey, the leader of the GE brassica project said, "we do not think that food safety experiments are necessary." [Our Changing World, 10.5.07]

"Apparently in support and bypassing solid food safety evidence ERMA have said, "She'll be right Crop & Food, have your play at taxpayers expense, and we'll worry about the real point of all this later," said Steffan Browning of Soil & Health.

## **MAF, minister may face GM outcry 21.5.07**

[www.ruralnews.co.nz/Default.asp?task=article&subtask=show&item=12900&pageno=1](http://www.ruralnews.co.nz/Default.asp?task=article&subtask=show&item=12900&pageno=1)

Farmers caught up in the GM corn import saga said they were left out of pocket and out in the cold as a result of bungled biosecurity.

Last December MAF announced GM sweetcorn seed from US company Syngenta was incorrectly cleared by MAF's Quarantine service in October 2006. Seed was planted on 18 farms in Gisborne, Wairoa and Hawkes Bay over 258 ha. These crops were subsequently destroyed. Questions remained about who should take responsibility for the mistake and ensure full compensation is paid to farmers. Hawkes Bay farmer Andrew Field believed that because the delays weren't publicized, authorities were ignoring the issue.

Jim Anderton Minister for farming has recently assured the public that all costs to farmers have now been met.

### **Organic better than GE**

We all know this but now there is proof in the form of a report from UK Friends of the Earth released in March. Organics and other environmentally friendly agricultural practices 'create more jobs, use fewer resources and are more profitable' than using GE. The UK government, like ours, has been supporting GE technology at the expense of sustainable practices. This support of GE flies in the face of evidence of comparable yield of organics with conventionally grown produce and less inputs of chemical compounds including virtually no pesticides. 30% less energy and less water are also utilized.

[www.theecologist.org/news\\_detail.asp?content\\_id=800](http://www.theecologist.org/news_detail.asp?content_id=800)

### **Independent scientists present comprehensive scientific evidence**

An international coalition of scientists will talk to the European Parliament asking for a European and worldwide ban on GE crop release. They will discuss health and environmental impacts of GM crops, demise of bees, patents, biofuels, transgene contamination, degradation of soils and impacts on rural economies.

[www.i-sis.org.uk](http://www.i-sis.org.uk)

## **GM now organic 13.6.07**

Organic food can now contain almost 1% GM content, after a new ruling by EU ministers who voted to allow 0.9% limit on GMOs in organic food, whilst retaining the 'organic' label with no requirement to inform consumers that GMOs are present. Levels below 0.9 per cent are deemed 'adventitious or technically unavoidable'.

Environmental groups, claim that European governments will simply take the 0.9% as an acceptable standard for GMO contamination, rather than keeping it as a 'buffer' against accidental contamination.

Clare Oxborrow, Friends of the Earth's GM Campaigner, described the situation as 'completely unacceptable', calling for tough, new legislation to protect farmers from 'genetic pollution'. 'EU Ministers have put the interests of the biotech industry ahead of consumers who believe that organic food should be produced to strict environmental standards,' she said. 'Organic farmers will now find it increasingly difficult to protect their crops from GM.'

### **GE rice contamination & NZFSA**

The NZFSA plan to take a do nothing approach to contamination of imported rice, by an unapproved variant, despite being illegal if for sale unlabelled.

58,100 tonnes of long grain rice have been imported into New Zealand, of that 0.23-0.41% came from the US, equivalent to 136-236 tonnes. Following the lead of other regulatory agencies around the world they state "that LLRICE 601 is as safe to consume as conventional rice" advising that the novel protein in liberty link GE crops, including LLRICE 601 is non toxic to humans and other animals.

NZFSA has identified importers of US long grain rice and reminded them of any obligation under the Food Act 1981 and the Food Standards Code but Testing for LLRICE 601 has not been instigated despite requests. NZFSA must be presuming that any contamination is below 1% without any proof.

### **GM maize 863 toxic 3.5.07**

French scientists have found signs of toxicity to liver and kidneys in a report on controversial Bt maize MON 863.

In 2003 Monsanto sought approval to import maize into Europe for processing and as a feed but not as food or for cultivation. The German regulatory authority concluded no risk to human health or the environment but other member states raised objections, namely a potential for allergic reactions and toxicity.

A Monsanto feeding study showed adverse effects dismissed as 'not biologically meaningful'. The study was kept from public scrutiny under a false claim of confidential business information until ordered to release it a year later by a German court.

*FSANZ – our regulatory approval authority returned Monsanto data without even keeping a copy. They stated 'the feeding study was previously evaluated by FSANZ'*

### **GM maize 59122 Not Safe**

[www.i-sis.org.uk/GMmaize59122notSafe.php](http://www.i-sis.org.uk/GMmaize59122notSafe.php)

Regulatory agencies all appear to dismiss differences between GE and non GE food in safety tests.

GE Maize 59122 developed by Dow chemicals and Pioneer has herbicide resistance and Bt genes making it Round-Up and pest resistant. An application for use in food, feed, processing and other products is considered by the European Food Safety Authority as 'unlikely to have any adverse effect on human and animal health and the environment in the context of its intended uses'.

The company simultaneously applied to Canada, China, Japan and Korea for import and environmental release and to Mexico, Taiwan and Australia and New Zealand for food use and an application for non-regulated status is before the USDA. Food Safety Australia and New Zealand FSANZ approved this variant as food October 2005. GE Free NZ will send this new info to them and urge a reassessment.

**Last year Syngenta Australia applied for GE approval from FSANZ for accidental contamination by GE amylase-modified corn line 3272, This GE corn intended for US ethanol production, however the**

ethanol produced could be used for food applications. FSANZ examined the allergenicity, toxicity and other characteristics of corn line 3272 and concluded that it is as safe as its conventionally produced counterpart.

### **Russian scientists raise red flag over GE foods GE Free NZ PR 15.5.07**

[www.regnum.ru/english/813298.html](http://www.regnum.ru/english/813298.html)

Russian scientists have gone public in Moscow, with a warning to authorities that their research has revealed alarming effects from GE foods previously believed to be "safe".

"Results of our research of GMO influence upon living organisms make doubtful their harmlessness for living organisms Alexander Baranov, president of the National Assoc. of Genetic Safety said. "This must be grounds for serious reflection at official governmental institutions." ... "we feed our children with food, safety of which nobody can guarantee."

### **Endocrine Disruption linked to GE Crop Sprays GE Free NZ PR 21.5.07**

GE crops designed to survive toxic herbicides may increase people's exposure to chemicals linked to reproductive and endocrine problems.

New research has just been published into the effects of glyphosate-an active ingredient of Round-Up and other herbicides showing this link since herbicide resistant GE crops can result in higher residue levels in foods.

### **Approval of human protein Rice threatens US industry GE Free NZ PR 23.5.07**

The US government has approved planting of GE rice to produce human proteins, but the decision threatens the US rice industry and exports.

Food manufacturers have already been alerted to contamination of US rice supplies by an unapproved GE variant last year, and countries around the world have rejected shipments of GE rice. Now GE contamination and a collapse in confidence in US food safety could reach a new high. Ventria Bioscience received approval (despite 20,005 comments against and 29 for it) to grow rice in Kansas. It is genetically modified to produce proteins found in breast milk, saliva and tears. They plan to use it to treat sickness in babies.

### **GE Mosquitos release unpredictable**

Guardian weekly 30.3.07 J.Randerson

A plan to release GE mosquitos into the wild where they will take over from the malaria carrying mosquito, ultimately becoming the predominant strain is proposed by scientists at John Hopkins Uni. Maryland, USA. They could be released in Africa within 5 years. Many human lives may be saved but with what effects on the natural system. It is suggested there could be a devastating impact on the food chain as larvae and adults are food for fish, birds and bats and are important pollinators.

### **US courts critical of USDA GM approvals 16.2.07**

[www.GEinfo.org.nz/042007/05.html](http://www.GEinfo.org.nz/042007/05.html)

US federal courts have handed down 2 decisions recently chiding the USDA - US Dept. of Agriculture for not properly evaluating the environmental impact of GE crops before permitting field trials.

The courts ordered the USDA to halt approval of all new field trials of GE crops until more thorough environmental reviews are conducted, and ruled that past approvals are illegal. The trials involve herbicide resistant grasses and alfalfa manufactured by Monsanto, who intend to explore their legal options while plaintiffs seek an injunction on sales and plantings of GE alfalfa.

### **Feed contained illegal GE maize despite US GE free certification 5.07**

Irish Dept of Agriculture impounded 7,000 tonnes of US corn gluten animal feed containing illegal GE maize, Herculex Rw in Dublin's port. The cargo, sampled by Greenpeace in Rotterdam where further cargo was impounded found GM material not authorised in the EU, but legal in the US. Dutch authorities said that official samples taken by them had tested positive with Herculex Rw maize. The issues of misleading certification is to be taken up at EU level and the US authorities will be asked to explain.

### **GE crops may produce herbicide inside our intestines. 3.6.06**

[www.non-gm-farmers.com/news\\_details.asp?ID=2778](http://www.non-gm-farmers.com/news_details.asp?ID=2778)

## **Biofuels - the new face of GE**

**The public is against GE in food but now biotech companies are about to try and turn the tide of public opposition with non-food GE.**

The public appear ready to be convinced that biofuels will ensure they can continue to drive their cars and live in the style to which they have become accustomed. A recent article in the Ecologist (29.3.07 [www.theecologist.org/archive\\_detail.asp?content\\_id=831](http://www.theecologist.org/archive_detail.asp?content_id=831)) suggests Monsanto and Syngenta are trying to persuade the public "GM is a good thing" by promoting biofuels as an industrial 'green' energy commodity. They aim to do this in 2 ways:

Firstly by designing GE maize with increased yields, drought resistance and ethanol conversion potential and secondly by making enzymes to convert cellulose to ethanol.

Maize is still the most commonly produced crop for biofuel but its energy yield is relatively small and considerable energy is expended in its production.

Since much biodiesel production relies heavily on oil crops sunflower, palm and soy, increases in GE soya plantings could well result. GE palm trees with increased insect resistance, growth and cellulose production are also being developed.

Syngenta has applied to import a maize genetically engineered to produce an enzyme helping with fuel conversion into Europe. Scientists and government are also assisting with the push.

A US biotech umbrella organization stated "America's breadbasket could soon become our energy fields."

Grain reserves are at their lowest ever and don't look like improving after the Australian drought this year, Prices are increasing rapidly on the world markets and this can only get worse. GE grain and oil crops modified and grown for biofuel use put world food security at great risk. Is this ethical?

Other countries where regulations are lax or there are few human rights and little public democracy are also being targeted. Brazil aims to grow more GE soy and Argentina has introduced incentives for GE soy for biodiesel.

There is also a push to grow biofuels

in Africa, where are no biosafety policies and the people have been striving to keep their agriculture free of GE contamination. Benefits to both environment and development have been cited at international meetings, despite the threat of contamination to the food security of African nations. The growing of biofuels for export would compete for the better land with food crops for home consumption and cause further deforestation. South Africa is the only African country to commercialize the growing of GE crops to date.

The biotech industry is also promoting GE trees as biofuels; variants with reduced lignin and increased cellulose for biofuels are being developed putting other trees at risk of contamination. Tree pollen can spread for up to 1000k in any direction giving huge contamination issues.

Any reduction in lignin may well cause problematic effects to trees rigidity. GE trees are also being proposed as carbon sinks to alleviate global warming.

In the US huge amounts of money are being thrown at biofuels including infrastructure, farm subsidies and tax breaks. In 2006 Archer Daniel Midlands, the world's largest agribusiness made up 28% of US ethanol industry. Every dollar of ADM's profit cost the taxpayer \$30.

Farm subsidies will hurt the taxpayer, change the dynamics around food production. Ethanol from corn in the US has also been estimated to add \$1 billion to beef production.

Why are biofuels being targeted over and above other energy technologies when even if all the land on which we currently grow crops were put into biofuels around the world this would still only account for 20% of our current demand.

The quantity of water required to grow the crop also needs to be put into the equation. For every litre of bioethanol produced in a modern refinery 13 litres of wastewater containing dead yeast and small amounts of ethanol are generated. This water, if discharged into watercourses reduces oxygen availability to other species. The Biological Oxygen Demand (BOD) is 3 to 6 times that of sewage.

## **Company Grows GE Eucalyptus**

GE eucalyptus trees are growing in US Baldwin County in an experiment to turn wood into fuel for American motorists. **Altered in laboratories in New Zealand** to withstand American caterpillars and colder temperatures than their native habitat, the trees have been growing on a secret plot for 2 years. ArborGen, a South Carolina-co., won't reveal the location of the GE trees, citing "security reasons." A third genetic modification is a secret, considered "confidential business information" by both ArborGen and government.

50 Indigenous Peoples Organisations and NGOs have called for a ban on GE trees and called for compliance with the precautionary approach, warning that the biofuels boom will lead to dangerous experimentation with trees and wreak havoc on native forests.

ArborGen now have approval to grow the eucalypts and they will be allowed to flower and produce seed. This was specifically forbidden under the original permit to grow the trees and test for cold tolerance.

To be used for bioethanol ArborGen say they require a fraction of the energy of maize to raise and harvest and produce 8 gallons of ethanol for every gallon of fuel used to farm and process them.

ArborGen is a partnership between International Paper and Mead Westvaco, **and New Zealand-based genetic laboratory, Genesis Research and Development.** In California, eucalyptus has long been recognized as a noxious invasive species, displacing native habitats, disrupting water supplies and playing a significant role in worsening wild fires, since it contains volatile oils.

Read more on our site [www.gefree.org.nz](http://www.gefree.org.nz) go to our press release of 5.7.07 Call for Ban on GM Trees

**We need to let our governments know that we do not support any public funding of research into GE biofuels. We do not want GE biofuels at any price to preserve our energy guzzling cars & lifestyles.**

## **Monsanto attack local rulings to regulate food and crops**

Since 1998, biotech & food cos have tried to take away local and states' rights to ban or regulate GE and other controversial foods and crops. In 2006 groups successfully blocked the *National Uniformity for Food Act* that would have nullified 200 US food safety and food labeling laws.

Failing to suppress grassroots control over food safety laws and labels in the last session of Congress, industry is asking friends in House Subcommittee on Livestock, Dairy, & Poultry to slip wording into an obscure section of the 2007-2012 Farm Bill, giving the White House appointed Secretary of Agriculture the power to eliminate local or state food and farming laws, such as those in four California counties banning GE crops, This would set an ominous precedent undermining states' rights. [www.organicconsumers.org/articles/article\\_5424.cfm](http://www.organicconsumers.org/articles/article_5424.cfm)

## **Cuba to back ethanol despite Castro**

Fidel Castro believes more biofuels especially if made from maize may starve the world's poor yet Cuba is still pushing ahead with modernization of their ethanol production which at present is not used for cars.

## **Victoria may lift GM crop ban**

13.5.07 Australian state, Victoria is expected to lift a ban on planting GE food crops, preparing to scrap the moratorium that stops farmers using GM products after pressure from farm groups and federal govt.

## **Venezuela to ban GE crops**

Monsanto's plan to grow 500,000 acres of GE crops in Venezuela have been thwarted by the nation's popular President, Hugo Chavez. Chavez, learning of the aim, ordered an end to the project. Chavez is encouraging Venezuela's national legislature to pass some of the most sweeping restrictions on GE organisms in the entire Western Hemisphere.

[www.organicconsumers.org/articles/article\\_5353.cfm](http://www.organicconsumers.org/articles/article_5353.cfm)

Friends of the Earth called for tough, new legislation to protect farmers from 'genetic pollution'.

## **Playing God**

Scientists are on the brink of creating the world's first artificial life form – a living organism never before found in nature. They promise solutions to everything from malaria to climate change. Salvation? Or a step too far?

By Hope Shand, Jim Thomas and Kathy Jo Wetter

[www.theecologist.org/archive\\_detail.asp?content\\_id=967](http://www.theecologist.org/archive_detail.asp?content_id=967)

Extract.....Synthetic Governance?

Advocates promote synthetic biology as the key to cheap biofuels, a cure for malaria, cheaper drugs and climate change remediation a strategy that aims to preempt public concerns about a dangerous and controversial technology.

However, a growing number of civil society organisations and social movements, particularly those that have campaigned against genetic engineering and the patenting of life, recognise that such extreme biotech is a technology that could pose grave threats to people and the planet, despite its media friendly gloss.

For some, the quest to build new, living organisms in the laboratory crosses unacceptable ethical boundaries the ultimate reductionist science. Concerns were heightened in May 2006 when proposals for self-governance were put forward by synthetic biologists meeting at Syn Bio 2.0 in Berkeley measures that would serve as pre-emptive action to avoid potentially more stringent government regulations. In response, 38 civil society organisations from around the world signed an open letter to the synthetic biology community, expressing concern that this potentially powerful technology is being developed without proper societal debate concerning socio-economic, security, health, environmental and human rights implications. The letter dismissed the self-governance proposals as inadequate and noted that the implications are too serious to be left to well meaning but self-interested scientists.

Ultimately, it is not for scientists to control public discourse or determine regulatory frameworks. Whether by deliberate misuse or as a result of

unintended consequences, synthetic biology will introduce new and potentially catastrophic societal risks. In keeping with the Precautionary Principle, synthetic microbes should be treated as dangerous until proven harmless. At a minimum, environmental release of de novo synthetic organisms should be prohibited until wide societal debate and strong governance are in place. Public debate must go beyond biosecurity (bioweapons/bioterrorism) and biosafety (worker safety and environment). There must be a broad societal debate on synthetic biology's wider socio-economic and ethical implications, on control and ownership of the technology and whether it is socially acceptable or even desirable.

## **General Information about biofuels**

The breakdown of untreated waste products from sugarcane ethanol plants, (common in Brazil) results in methane production further exacerbating climate change. Ethanol plants also produce significant quantities of nitrous oxides (a greenhouse gas 300x more potent than CO<sub>2</sub>), carbon monoxide and VOCs (linked to ozone layer destruction and damage to human health) In 2006 the US EPA Environmental Protection Agency was forced by the biofuels lobby to raise biofuel facility threshold emissions from 100 tons per year to 250 tons per year in order to maintain their future despite inherent risks to public health.

Nitrous oxides can also react with VOCs creating low-level ozone giving rise to urban smog and respiratory problems. Blends of ethanol and petrol result in increased fuel evaporation of 14-18%. Biodiesel a solvent, corrodes soft metals, which could lead to further chemical pollution, and solidifies at 4-5C requiring preheating or toxic anti gelling compounds.

Biofuel production is estimated to exacerbate climate change by: ploughing, fertilizers, and distillation of fuels and destruction of habitats. Measuring all inputs it takes 6,597 kilocalories to produce a litre of ethanol containing 5,130 kilocalories = 22% loss. Millions of acres of rainforest, grasslands and farmland across Latin America, Asia and Africa are at risk from biofuel monoculture.

## Prism Webcast News

The new technologies made available by the Internet have opened up new possibilities to provide an alternative focus on current news events from the mainstream media. Prism Webcast News is working to take advantage of these technologies to provide coverage of local and global environmental, sustainability, GE Free and human rights news.

The main focus of Prism Webcast News is in the interviewing of people in the current news, as well as special topics of interest in current affairs. These interviews are in an MP3 format and can be listened to at:

[http://prismwebcastnews.com/pwn/?page\\_id=405](http://prismwebcastnews.com/pwn/?page_id=405)

Audio/podcast interviews can be found at the above webpage on the topics of:

- NZ Budget 2007 from an environmental perspective with representatives from Soil & Health, Greenpeace and Forest & Bird.
- Human genetic engineering with Dr David King of Human genetic Alert UK.
- Save Happy Valley news.
- Extended interview with Claire Bleakly of GE Free NZ and Steffan Browning of Soil & Health on Erma's GE Brassica decision.
- Interview with Mae Wan Ho on Quantum Jazz and the Tao of Biology.

These are just the beginning in an exciting new development in alternative news media with Prism Webcast News.

Text news can be found at:

<http://www.prismwebcastnews.com/pwn/>

## **REGISTER YOUR HOME AS A GE FREE ZONE**

Pass the info on to all your friends and any folk in rural areas you know support the initiative. 5602 Properties registered - covering 54,860.99 acres. [www.gefreeregister.org.nz](http://www.gefreeregister.org.nz)

**When you have finished with your newsletter, pass it on ...**

## **Documentary on GE Trees**

A Silent Forest: The Growing Threat, Genetically Engineered Trees', 45 min docu narrated by Dr. David Suzuki on **Available for purchase at** [www.customflix.com/207574](http://www.customflix.com/207574)

## **"The Future of Food"**

Videos are now available in NZ Price \$25 per DVD postage for more info contact us at Head Office. A fantastic documentary, the film is an effective tool in educating people at all levels of awareness about the GE issue.

## **Robert Anderson**

**The Ultimate War Crime** reveals the truth about use of **depleted uranium** (DU) weapons in modern war zones. Most vulnerable are the children.

**Profits from the book will go towards medicines for Iraqi children.**

*The Ultimate War Crime*, NZ **\$15.00**, including delivery in NZ.

## **The Ultimate WAR CRIME**



*Children of the Gulf War*  
A silent legacy of suffering and death



## **Also available, The Final Pollution.**

Allan Baddock (Editor, *Organic NZ*) says "everything you'd expect from Robert Anderson - a straightforward, easy to read examination of the GE debate from all sides.

*The Final Pollution* costs NZ **\$24.95**, including delivery within NZ.

Please send cheque with book orders to R G & J Anderson Books, PO Box 8188, Cherrywood, Tauranga Enquiries 64 7 576 5721 or [roberta@clear.net.nz](mailto:roberta@clear.net.nz).

**GE Free NZ AGM**  
**Wellington Arts Centre, 61**  
**Abel Smith St. Wellington**  
**9.00-4 00 Sunday 26 August**  
**2007 All members welcome**

**T Shirts** natural unbleached cotton with rainbow GE Free NZ logo \$20.00 incl.P&P from Head office. Bumper stickers + GE Free corflute signs also available see website.

## **GE Free NZ Contacts**

We're on the web, visit:

[www.gefree.org.nz](http://www.gefree.org.nz)

**Head office:** PO Box 693, Nelson  
Ph 03 547 9383 Fax 03 547 9329  
Email: [info@gefree.org.nz](mailto:info@gefree.org.nz)

Auckland GE-Free NZ,  
[youcangetmeonline@yahoo.com](mailto:youcangetmeonline@yahoo.com)

GE Aware Nelson GEAN  
Susie Lees 03 546 7966  
[gefree@ts.co.nz](mailto:gefree@ts.co.nz)

GE Free Northland  
Sushila Ajani  
[www.gefreenorthland.org.nz](http://www.gefreenorthland.org.nz)

GE Free Wellington  
Jon Muller 04 589 0536  
[jon.muller@xtra.co.nz](mailto:jon.muller@xtra.co.nz)

GE Free Taupo  
Dawn Eskelsen  
07 377 4563

GE Free Wairarapa  
Claire Bleakley 06 308 9842  
[p.bleakley@orcon.net.nz](mailto:p.bleakley@orcon.net.nz)

GE Free Palmerston North  
Christine McArthur  
[nztamaki@value.net.nz](mailto:nztamaki@value.net.nz)

## **Press contacts:**

Spokesperson  
Jon Carapiet 09 815 3370  
[youcangetmeonline@yahoo.com](mailto:youcangetmeonline@yahoo.com)

## **Transgenic animal/health issues**

Claire Bleakley 06 308 9842  
[p.bleakley@orcon.net.nz](mailto:p.bleakley@orcon.net.nz)

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# Legal Challenge Against GE Brassica Field Trials



GE Free NZ (in food and environment) has filed High Court papers opposing ERMA's approval for field trials of GE Brassica. Your support is needed.

**Keep our food GE-Free !**

## HOW YOU CAN HELP

GE-Free NZ has launched a fighting-fund for this and for future legal challenges. Please make a donation.  
See: [www.gefree.org.nz](http://www.gefree.org.nz) for more information.

Cheques can be sent to:  
GE Free NZ, PO Box 693 Nelson

Donations can be paid directly to account:  
# 0609960521358 00  
(National Bank: GE Free New Zealand in Food and Environment Inc.)



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