



CARING FOR OUR FOOD SYSTEM SAYING NO TO CORPORATE CONTROL

The Greens' plan for improved GM assessments, labelling and farmer protection

The Greens care about Australian food and agriculture. We are the only ones prepared to stand up to big GM companies to give farmers and consumers genuine choice and control over what they grow and eat.

Despite decades of research and commercialisation, genetically modified foods have still not been proven safe and the advertised benefits of GM crops are yet to be seen. Crop yields have not increased, but the use of pesticides on our food has¹. The only ones profiting from GM are large GM companies.

Genetically modified organisms readily contaminate at all levels of the food chain². Non-GM farmers suffer market and economic losses when their crops are contaminated, and must bear the responsibility of contamination cleanup. Inadequate assessments and labelling of our foods mean that GM products can slip through loopholes and onto our plates³.

Unlike the old parties, the Greens have a plan to protect farmers and consumers from the effects of genetically modified organisms.

> CHOOSING GM-FREE

The Greens' plan to provide genuine choice and control over our food has three main strategies:

- **Begin work on a GM Contamination Cleanup Fund.** The Greens would direct up to \$2 million towards the creation of an independent Research and Development Group tasked with establishing how and to set up a GM contamination fund underwritten by a levy on GM seed
- **Establish an inquiry into the assessment procedures for GM crops and products** particularly given new evidence that current processes do not test for dsRNA.
- **Introduce comprehensive, mandatory labeling** so that all foods containing any ingredient, additives, processing aid or other constituent produced using GM would be clearly labeled with this information.

> PROTECTING FARMERS: GM CONTAMINATION LEVY

When non-GM crops are contaminated by GM crops, it is important that liability lies with those responsible. The 'polluter pays principle' is accepted international environmental law⁴. In order to reverse liability so that GM companies are held responsible, we propose to introduce a levy upon GM companies. Non-GM landholders can draw from this levy to recoup financial losses in the case of contamination. A Research and Development Group will be formed to undertake a two million dollar scoping study on establishing a GM Contamination Levy. The Levy aims to:

Require GM companies to pay an annual levy based on volume of seed sold. The monies would be held in a trust fund for non-GM growers to draw from in the case of contamination.

Protect non-GM growers through compensating for crop testing, contamination clean up, market losses and reductions to land value. The availability of a compensation scheme means farmers to not have to resort to common law.

Be cost-neutral as the funds will be levied on the GM companies.

Be administered independently, ideally within an existing government department.

The GM Contamination Levy protects farmers' choice of cultivation and their rights within this choice.





> SAYING NO TO CORPORATE CONTROL OF OUR FOOD SYSTEM

Despite the big promises to feed the world that have been made by some of the companies that sell GM seeds, GM crops have not substantially improved global poverty, and more than one billion people are still hungry. In reality, GM technology will never be able to address significant contributing factors to poverty, including food waste and food crops like corn and sugar being used as fuel.

Instead, the GM industry enables corporate control of agricultural resources. Nearly seventy per cent of global seed sales are now controlled by a small number of large biotechnology corporations through patents and intellectual property rights. Within the corporate-controlled system, growers are obligated to purchase agricultural inputs (including GM seeds, fertilisers and herbicides), and are limited in where they can sell their produce. As large corporations wield growing control over farmers, the influence of government structures reduces. Growers and consumers face limited choices and increased prices.

Corporations are also gaining greater leverage within agricultural research and development⁵. Private sector research represents around one third of international spending on agricultural research. The trend of public-private partnerships in public-sector research establishments enables private access to public resources, while skewing research towards avenues of interest to private companies. This trend has been particularly beneficial to the development of GM technology and has facilitated greater influence of industry over science⁵.

> PROTECTING CONSUMERS: AN INQUIRY INTO GM ASSESSMENTS

We all have a right to eat safe and healthy food. GM foods have not yet been proven safe. A recent study has shown that double-stranded ribonucleic acid (dsRNA) proteins can be unexpectedly produced in genetic modification processes³. These proteins transfer easily to humans and animals, and can change our genes.

At present, the Australian bodies that assess genetically modified products (Food Standards Australia and New Zealand (FSANZ) and the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator (OGTR)) do not adequately assess dsRNA proteins in their evaluations.

This lack of assessment demonstrates the weakness in our current food testing regimes. There is also no appropriate assessment in place for products with highly refined GM ingredients or foods that involve genetically modified organisms in their production, such as foods from animals fed GM feed.

The Greens plan to launch an inquiry into the assessment of all GM products, to strengthen our testing processes which will to protect our right to genuine choice over the food we eat.

> CARING FOR CONSUMERS: MANDATORY GM LABELLING

Opinion polls show that 90% of Australians want ingredients derived from GM crops to be labelled on food. Yet the labelling of GM food in Australia is extremely limited and excludes some of the most basic and universally used ingredients. GM ingredients appear as hidden ingredients in processed foods, as well as in the meat, eggs and milk produced from animals fed on GM grains.

Accurate food labelling is important to allow Australians to have clear and accessible information on the many factors people want to know about their food.



¹ Benbrook, C.M. 2012. Impacts of genetically engineered crops on pesticide use in the U.S. – the first sixteen years. *Environmental Sciences Europe* 24 (24). Doi:10.1186/2190-4715-24-24. <http://www.enveurope.com/content/pdf/2190-4715-24-24.pdf>

² Born, H. and P. Sullivan. 2002. *Marketing Organic Grains*. Butte, MT: Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas (ATTRA).

³ Heinemann, J.A., S.Z. Agapito-Tenfen and J.A. Carman. 2013. A comparative evaluation of the regulation of GM crops or products containing dsRNA and suggested improvements to risk assessments. *Environmental International* 55 (2013): 43-55.

⁴ Sands, P. 2003. *Principles of international environmental law*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁵ Vanloqueren, G. and P.V. Baret. 2009. How agricultural research systems shape a technological regime that develops genetic engineering but locks out agroecological innovations. *Research Policy* 30 (2009): 971-983.