



The United Church of Canada General Council

GCE The Regulation and Labelling of Genetically Modified (GM) Foods (2005-04-21-239)

True Document Date

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WHEREAS we are called "to live with respect in creation" (A New Creed), "taking care that our actions do not seriously harm the greater web of life" (38th General Council 2003); and

WHEREAS "systems for approving, regulating, and monitoring genetically modified (GM) foods should clearly embody the precautionary principle" (38th General Council 2003); and

WHEREAS "the process of approving, regulating, and monitoring GM foods should be based on the principles of independence, transparency, accountability, and participation" (38th General Council 2003); and

WHEREAS "government agencies regulating GM foods must be clearly independent from the parties developing these foods" (38th General Council 2003); and

WHEREAS "the testing of GM foods must in no way be biased or influenced by the parties seeking their approval" and "all details and results of testing must be available for independent peer review" (38th General Council); and

WHEREAS "the public must have a way to provide input into the regulatory process- particularly when the introduction of a GM food variety has the potential to adversely affect a sector of the public ecologically, economically, or health-wise" (38th General Council 2003); and

WHEREAS "questions of responsibility and liability for any adverse effects resulting from the production or consumption of a GM food variety must be clarified" (38th General Council 2003); and

WHEREAS "consumers must have fair, trustworthy, and understandable tools that enable them to choose whether or not to consume GM foods" (38th General Council 2003);

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Executive of the General Council of The United Church of Canada, through the office of the General Secretary, advocate for the following measures and changes to the current framework that the Government of Canada uses to approve, regulate, monitor, and label genetically modified foods by calling on the Government of Canada to:

1. Establish a new, independent government agency at "arm's length" to test and monitor all genetically modified (GM) foods.
2. Place an immediate moratorium on the approval of new genetically modified (GM) food varieties until a more rigorous and independent system for approving, regulating, monitoring, and labelling GM foods has been fully implemented (as outlined in points 3 to 10 below). This moratorium would not apply to research, only to the actual approval of new GM crop and animal varieties used for human food or for animal feed.
3. Commission thorough, independent, peer-reviewed research into some of the key, unanswered safety and ecological concerns around GM foods. Based on the results of these investigations, new regulations should be devised to ensure

the safety and ecological sustainability of GM food crops, including a complete prohibition on any technologies that pose a significant health or ecological risk.

4. Ensure that a new genetically modified food variety would be approved only if
 - an integrated testing regime of whole foods carried out by the independent government testing agency (point 1 above) demonstrates-to the best of current scientific ability-that the new food poses no significant health or ecological risk-either short or long term
 - all data produced during the testing and evaluation of the new GM food variety is published and scientific peer review of this data raises no additional concerns that have not been addressed by subsequent research
 - additional concerns (health, ecological, and economic) raised through an open public input process have also been adequately addressed
 - a detailed assessment of potential economic impacts has been carried out and the probability of a net negative economic impact-including impacts caused by the reduction of export markets or by the contamination of non-GM varieties-has been demonstrated to be very small
5. Ban the use of all antibiotic-resistance marker genes in GM foods and deregister all GM foods currently incorporating these genes as licensed varieties. The importation and commercialization of all such GM food varieties should be prohibited, their registration should be rescinded, and systematic and scrutinized efforts should be made to remove such varieties-to the extent this is possible-from the food chain as well as from the ecosystems where they were grown.
6. Prohibit the use of GM food crops to produce chemical and pharmaceutical products such as drugs and hormones that could have negative health impacts on humans or animals if consumed unintentionally. This ban should be extended to include plants like tobacco that are consumed in some fashion by

humans, even if not as food per se. To avoid ecological risks, even non-food crops and animals used to produce potentially harmful chemical and pharmaceutical products should be raised only in strictly controlled, enclosed environments.

7. Prohibit the approval of GM food crops for use as animal feed that are not also approved for human consumption and ensure that equal rigour is applied to the testing of crops destined primarily for animal feed as for those destined for human consumption.
8. Retest as quickly as is feasible-once the new independent agency and regulatory regime for GM foods have been implemented-all GM food varieties currently approved for consumption. The retesting of existing varieties should take priority over the testing and approval of new food varieties-i.e., the moratorium on the approval of new GM varieties should not be lifted until the food varieties currently approved have been retested (unless they have been voluntarily withdrawn from the market and deregistered). Those GM food varieties that do not meet the new approval threshold should have their registration rescinded, their import and commercialization should be prohibited, and systematic and scrutinized efforts should be made to remove such varieties-to the extent this is possible-from the food chain as well as from the ecosystems where they were grown.
9. Implement a system of mandatory labelling for all GM foods-domestically produced and imported-based on the model currently employed in the European Union (which labels an ingredient as GM if more than 0.9% of that ingredient is derived from varieties based on rDNA technology). As well, an effective system of segregation for the cropping, transportation, storage, and marketing of GM crops should be implemented.
10. Empower the independent government testing agency to implement a system to monitor the long-term health and ecological effects of GM crops and animals and revoke the registration of any food variety subsequently discovered to be harmful.

11. Hold companies introducing GM crops and livestock accountable-including financially accountable-for the costs their products create for other farmers and the general public through transgene movement (i.e., the costs generated when inserted genes contaminate non-GM varieties).
12. Withhold regulatory approval for any variety of GM wheat because of the significant negative economic impacts that the introduction of GM wheat would generate through the resulting erosion of Canada's wheat export markets.
13. Withhold regulatory approval for any variety of GM fish due to high risk for the spread of transgenes (inserted genes) into wild fish populations and the potentially catastrophic ecological effects this could produce.

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