Genetic Engineering: The hidden ingredient in Philippine food.

"I understand that a lot of the farm products from the US like soybean and corn are already GM and yet they are not labeled. We should at least know what we are importing because the consumer has a right to know what he is consuming."

- Agriculture Secretary Leonardo Q. Montemayor

In just a few years growing awareness of the threats from Genetically Engineered (GE) food has sparked a global wave of rejection by consumers, farmers and food companies in many of the world’s largest food markets such as Europe, Japan, Brazil and North America. Supermarkets have cleared genetically engineered food from their shelves, global food companies have removed GE ingredients from their products and leading pig and poultry producers have promised not to feed their animals GE feed. While international governments have maintained bans on the planting of genetically engineered crops, nations such as Saudi Arabia, Japan, and Brazil have turned away shipments of GE contaminated commodities. Indeed a whole new international market in GE-free crops has developed with even its own separate listing on the Japanese commodities exchange.

New laboratory tests conducted for Greenpeace reveal that the same genetically engineered foods being removed from markets worldwide are now turning up in the Philippines contaminating popular everyday food items. None of this food is labeled despite promises made by international food companies. Some of the foods are produced by the same companies who have removed GE foods in other parts of the world. Shockingly, none of these GE foods was subject to safety regulation by the Philippine government. The government does not even require that companies inform consumers about what they are eating. Instead, these potentially dangerous ingredients are being kept hidden from public knowledge.

Genetic engineering of food is an inherently risky process. Scientists do not know the long-term effects of releasing these unpredictable foods into our environment and our diets. Yet, genetically engineered ingredients are freely entering our food without adequate safeguards in place and without explicit consumer consent and knowledge. In effect, the Filipino consumer is being unwittingly force-fed genetically engineered food in a long-term experiment whose impacts on people’s health and the environment remain largely unknown. Greenpeace believes this is unacceptable.

Greenpeace tests reveal Genetically Engineered Food products

On Dec 19, 2000 Greenpeace commissioned an independent Hong Kong food-testing laboratory (Hong Kong DNA Chips Ltd) to test 30 common consumer food items available in Philippine supermarkets. The laboratory used a standard PCR test (polymerase chain reaction) to check for the presence of gene sequences from the two most commonly grown types of genetically engineered crops:

- Roundup Ready crops (primarily soya and corn) which have been genetically engineered to resist Monsanto’s herbicide ‘Roundup’ (Glyphosate).
- Bt Crops (primarily corn) that have been genetically engineered to produce an insecticide toxin.

Of the 30 products tested the following eleven tested positive:

1) Bonus Vienna Franks
2) Rica Protina Hotdogs
3) Campo Carne Moby Hotdogs
4) Purefoods Beefy hotdogs
5) Quality Foods Budget Franks
6) Foodmart Enterprises Crab Cake
7) Hong Chi Food Yung Ho Soya Drink
8) Doritos Smokey Red Barbecue
9) Nestlé Nesvita Natural Cereal Drink
10) Isomil Soy Infant Formula
11) Knorr Cream of Corn Soup
All 30 products were chosen for testing because they contained either Soya or Corn ingredients. All products were bought from a supermarket in Metro Manila.

Other products tested on behalf of Greenpeace included those made under the following brands: Swift, Nissin, Lucky Me, Campbell's, Kelloggs, Humpty Dumpty, Jack and Jill, Granny Goose, Pringles, Rosarita, Milupa and Wyeth. Because genetically engineered crops are commonly mixed with non-GE crops in the countries where they are grown, a one-off negative test result does not necessarily indicate that all products under those brands will prove GE-free. Greenpeace will be continuing to test these and other brands. We are also requesting details of these companies’ policies towards sourcing GE-free ingredients for their products.

**What is genetically engineered food?**

GE crops are produced using laboratory techniques where genetic material from the cells of one species is transferred into another species to artificially create new living organisms that would never naturally occur through breeding. An example is the case of putting genes from an arctic fish into tomatoes and strawberries to confer resistance to the cold. Of course fish and tomatoes would never naturally breed together in nature!

So far, all genetically engineered foods are developed and sold by large chemical companies usually to work alongside their own chemicals. Most GE crops worldwide are grown in USA, Canada, and Argentina.

The artificial organisms that result may be designed to offer a particular ‘benefit’ to the grower (such as resistance to a pesticide) but will almost always have other secondary effects that cannot be predicted. Because genetically engineered crops are alive, they can escape and reproduce in the open environment, making it virtually impossible to recall a genetically engineered crop especially when something unexpectedly goes wrong. Some of the problems already associated with genetically engineered crops include:

- **The production of unexpected toxins and allergens** – Because genetic engineering is a very imprecise technology, the insertion of foreign genes can stimulate the production of unexpected proteins, which may prove toxic or allergenic to those who consume them or may have side effects on the environment. In addition, the introduced gene product itself may trigger allergies. One example is the Brazil nut gene, which was transferred into a soybean. Unexpectedly the soybean became allergenic to anyone with nut allergies and had to be prevented from reaching the market. Luckily, nut allergies are very common and so could be checked for. However, most genetic engineering uses material from organisms such as viruses and bacteria, which are not previously part of the human diet.

- **Antibiotic resistance.** In order to check that the genetic engineering process has worked, scientists add genes that confer resistance to common antibiotics. Although only meant as ‘markers’ these genes are present throughout the GE food. Doctors worldwide warn that some antibiotics may become useless in human and veterinary medicine because of the widespread use of these antibiotic resistant genes. The European Union and doctors associations around the world have called for a ban on these dangerous markers.

- **Effects on the Environment.** Genetically engineered crops represent new and potentially invasive forms of life. We have already seen the devastating effect that new introduced species can have on their environment as they become pests (e.g. the introduction of the golden snail in the Philippines). Examples of harmful effects that have already been documented from GE crops include the leaching of toxins into the soil, the poisoning of beneficial and harmless insects such as lacewings or monarch butterfly larvae and also the creation of vigorous ‘superweeds’. For example, in Canada the field release of genetically modified canola resulted in the creation of triple herbicide tolerant canola weeds.
• **Contamination of seeds and crops.** While many consumers and farmers worldwide are choosing to avoid GE food and crops, people are still increasingly finding even non-GE stocks contaminated. This is due to crosspollination where contaminated pollen is carried by wind or as seeds spread out in the environment or are mixed up during handling. It is also becoming clear that genes can move about due to a little understood process known as horizontal gene transfer where bacteria takes up genetic material and exchanges it with other bacteria either in the soil or in the gut. The fear is that over time everything will be GE contaminated. If something goes wrong, it will be too late.

**There are also many ethical and social concerns**

• **GE foods remove consumer choice** – Because of the widespread contamination caused by GE crops and the fact that many GE crops are not kept separate in the food system, consumers in the Philippines have been denied the right to choose not to eat genetically engineered food. This is particularly serious since GE foods are not labeled or even regulated here in the Philippines.

• **Biopiracy** – In order to achieve the desired traits chemical companies often use genes acquired from plants, animals and bacteria that is found in poorer countries where most of the world’s biodiversity is to be found. The profits and benefits from using these genes generally accrue to rich agribusiness companies based in northern countries. In effect these genes are being stolen from the poor to feed corporate profits. Transnational companies then try to enforce their ownership of these genes through international patent law.

• **Loss of Farmers Rights.** – Because genetically engineered seeds are patented, the seed company can maintain strict control over how the seeds are used. US farmers who grow GE crops sign agreements that specify how the crop is to be farmed and promise not to save any seed. If farmers are found to save seed they are sued by the chemical companies. In this way, small farmers lose their basic rights to save seed, which has been the basis of food security since farming began. The GE crop companies now control the seed trade worldwide and US farmers are already reporting that non-GE seeds are becoming very hard to find.

• **Genetic engineering is unnatural** – Because genetic engineering crosses species boundaries and interferes in nature to create new living organisms that would never naturally occur, many people hold moral and spiritual objections to the genetic engineering of living things. Speaking last Nov. 12 2000 to an estimated 50,000 farmers from Italy and elsewhere at a special outdoor mass dedicated to farmers, the Pope expressed his opposition to genetically modified crops.

**The food companies who are sneaking GE into Philippine food**

The eleven products that tested positive represent a mixture of domestic and global food producers. They include not only the Philippines’s largest food producers such as Purefoods / San Miguel but also the largest food producers in the world like Nestlé and Unilever. Below is a short description of these companies:

• **Bonus Vienna Franks** is manufactured by Bavaria Food Processing Phils. Inc. exclusively for Supervalue, Inc. of ShoeMart Supermarkets. The Bonus brand not only carries food items but also toiletries and other products commonly found in any supermarket. The products are in turn sold in all ShoeMart department stores and supermarkets around the country. Compared to other brands, Bonus products are relatively cheaper. A phone call made to the purchasing department of ShoeMart on 12 March 2001 confirmed the absence of a policy on GMOs.
- **Rica Protina Hotdogs** is manufactured by Swift Foods, Inc., a subsidiary of RFM Corporation. RFM Corporation produces a wide range of consumer items, not necessarily food although six of its nine subsidiaries are food-related. Their food groups include: Selecta Dairy Products Incorporated which is involved in the production of ice cream and juices and has partnerships with Hershey’s and Sunkist; Cosmos Bottling Corporation, cola drinks like Pop, Sarsi, Sunkist, Jolt, RC, Cheers, Jaz and Aqua Prima Bottled Water; Filipinas Water Bottling Company, bottled water; RFM’s Bakery Group which produces flours and biscuits and other bakery products; Asia Foods Franchise Corp., and Swift Foods, Inc. involved in production of processed meats and fish. Swift Foods, Inc. hold s 22 percent of the market share of processed meats. It has 3 divisions: (1) an agribusiness division for poultry products and animal feeds; (2) a meat division for processed meat products and customized meat products for fast-food chains; and (3) the Tuna Corporation for canned tuna products. Swift’s supplies 45 MT of meat patties per month to McDonalds. RFM has yet to respond to a survey sent by Greenpeace to its consumer services department.

- **Campo Carne Moby Hotdogs** is manufactured by San Miguel Campo Carne Corporation, San Miguel Corporation. Its beverages include rum, beer, mineral water, malt beverages, juice drinks and gin. Its food group includes prominent brands such as Magnolia, Campo Carne, Monterey, Star Margarine and Anchor. Its partners include Coca-Cola Co., New Zealand Dairy Board, and Conservera Campofrio among others. San Miguel Campofrio is the third largest meat-processing corporation in the Philippines with a production of 14,000 MT. San Miguel Corporation Monterey supplies 45 MT per month of beef patties to Wendy’s, 5 MT per month of bone-in chicken to Texas Chicken, and 600 kilos per month of chicken patties to Burger King. San Miguel Corporation has yet to respond to inquiries made by Greenpeace regarding their policy on GMOs.

- **Purefoods Beefies Hotdog** is a product of the Purefoods Corporation. Purefoods Corporation is the largest meat-processing corporation with a market share of about 50%. Its average production volume is 150 MT per day for refrigerated meat and 150 MT per day for canned meat. It has 6 divisions: The Purefoods-Hormel Co., Inc; Poultry, Feeds and Livestock; Flour; Restaurants such as Burger King; Food Service Division; and MPM Noodles Corporation in partnership with Myojo Foods Co., Ltd of Japan and Mitsui Co. Ltd, a Japanese trading house giant. The head of the company’s R&D department, Ms. Beth España, in a telephone conversation last 12 March 2001, told Greenpeace that they do not have a policy on GMOs.

- **Quality Foods Budget Franks** is produced by JAKA Food Processing Enterprises, a company owned by the family of Senator Juan Ponce Enrile and Congressman Jack Enrile. Its meat products include brands such as Barney’s and Armour. It is the fifth largest corporation in the country that processes fresh meat products such as bacon, ham, hotdogs, and others. The research department of JAKA told Greenpeace that they know what GMOs are but they do not have a policy that addresses such concerns.

- **Crab Cake (Kani Kizami Age)** is an imported item repacked by Foodmark Enterprises. The product does not contain information on where the product is imported from nor contact addresses of the manufacturer and the distributor here in the Philippines. Greenpeace phoned Foodmark Enterprises and was told by the staff that only “their boss” knows where the product is imported from. They had no idea what GMOs are.

- **Knorr Cream of Corn Soup** is produced for Knorr-Nahrmittel Corp. AG by California Manufacturing Co., Inc., which started operations in the Philippines in 1955. Knorr is a subsidiary of the merger between Bestfoods and Unilever. Bestfoods products include soups, bouillons, sauces, meal kits, potato products, pasta and pasta dishes, corn oil, mayonnaise, dressings, peanut butter, desserts, and starches under products such as Bestfoods, Hellmann, Karo, Argo, Rit, Skippy, Mazola, Knorr and Nutrablend. These are all widely available in the Philippines and in fact showed "vigorous" sales in 1999. As the Unilever web site position on GMOs suggests, their position and the kind of action they will take will depend on the locality and the regulation.
• **Doritos Smokey Red Barbecue** is manufactured by Frito-Lay, Inc. for PepsiCo, Inc. Doritos snack items under brand names: Fritos, Doritos, Tostitos. The finished product is imported by the Philippines from the United States and sold in various supermarkets and food distribution outlets nationwide. The label does not indicate whether it contains GE ingredients or not since the US does not have laws that require GE products to be labeled as such.

• **Nesvita Natural Cereal Drink** is a product of Nestlé, one of the world’s largest food conglomerates. Nestlé Philippines manufactures and distributes their wide array of products like milk and other beverages, seasonings, sauces, noodles, infant formula, ice cream, coffee, chocolates, candies, cereals and so much more. Some of its brands available in the Philippines are Milo, Nan, Nestogen, Magnolia, Maggi, Bear Brand, Carnation, Alpine, and Nido. It has six manufacturing centers in the country. It manufactures pet food under brand names Alpo and Friskies. The Nestlé Philippines website does not mention how they deal with the issue of GMOs.

• **Isomil Soy Infant Formula** is manufactured by Abbott Laboratories in the Netherlands and is imported by Abbott Laboratories into the Philippines. The company has interests in pharmaceuticals and infant formula, which include brand names like Ensure and Similac. Abbott is also doing research on pharmaceutical products such as the development of morphine-like painkillers modeled from the poison secretions of Amazon frogs. Andrew Pollack of the New York Times (November 26, 1999) says the company stands to earn billions from this project. According to a certain Rolly de Vera of Abbott Laboratories, the company does not have a policy on genetic engineering in food items in the Philippines.

• **Yung Ho Soybean Milk** is a product of the Hong Chi Food Co., Ltd and is imported directly from Taiwan by Molina and Sons, Inc.

**Corporate double standards on GE Food**

Greenpeace is making these results public on World Consumer Rights day (March 15th) – an international day focusing on consumer rights and corporate responsibility. Not only do food companies have a responsibility to use safe products and inform Philippine consumers what is in their food but also to treat consumers with the same respect worldwide. In Europe companies such as Nestle and Unilever speak in favor of the consumers right to know, are proactive in labeling and have even removed GE ingredients in their products. At the same time these companies are force-feeding GE foods to Filipino consumers without even labeling their presence. Below are examples of these corporate double standards for Unilever, Nestlé, PepsiCo, and Abbott Laboratories – companies who maintain one standard for Europeans and another for Filipinos.

**Unilever (Knorr cream of corn soup).**

Global food giant Unilever, whose subsidiary Bestfoods manufactures Knorr products, is no stranger to the issue of genetically engineered food. In the past Unilever experimented with its own genetically engineered crops but then sold its plant breeding division to chemical company Monsanto.

In 1997 the co-chairman of Unilever, Morris Tabaksblat vowed that his company would protect consumers who do not want to buy food containing GE material:

“If in some countries the public wants GMO free products, then (Unilever) will try to find them” he said “whether this means buying other ingredients or reverting to traditional raw materials … if we fail to respect consumers’ views, we should not be doing our jobs properly.”

Indeed throughout the European Union, Unilever has adopted a policy of banning GE ingredients from its brands and is currently pursuing the same policy in Australia and New Zealand.

• “I can confirm to you that we have effectively taken all measures for the products produced under our brands to not contain GMO’s. The steps that we have started as soon as the
beginning of 1999, and which are now implemented, are many and depend on the raw material used: We have substituted soya and maize for other plants where this is desirable, we have researched with our suppliers identity preserved sources, we have demanded guaranties from them regarding traceability and we have put in place controls to be assured of the results.”

Letter to Greenpeace from Bernard Henrot  
Director of External relations, Unilever France 12 May 2000

- “Unilever Australasia has completed an audit of its food products to identify all ingredients that may be deemed to be genetically modified. The company has embarked on a programme to replace all these ingredients with non-GM alternatives or identity preserved (IP) equivalents.”

Letter to Greenpeace from Gary West  
Corporate Relations Unilever Australasia, 1 Feb 2001

A similar letter to Greenpeace has also confirmed that Unilever’s European ban on GE food extends to Bestfoods, who produce Knorr products.

“As European Consumers have expressed a preference for products free of GM ingredients, Bestfoods UK Ltd has taken steps to ensure that our products do not contain any GM materials. We regularly test our products and ingredients to ensure that this is the case.”

Letter to Greenpeace from PE Whittal  
Bestfoods UK 19th Sept 2000

Meanwhile Unilever/Bestfoods continues to use GE ingredients in food sold in the Philippines.

Unilever in the Philippines is also failing to meet its own promises to label genetically engineered foods:

In 1997, Unilever in the United Kingdom proudly announced that it would be the first company in the world to voluntarily label its GE foods in advance of government regulations. It labeled a soya product called ‘Beanfeast’ and promised to label further GE ingredients in its food. As a result sales of Beanfeast fell by 50% and ultimately Unilever was forced to remove the GE ingredients altogether.

In that same year Unilever established 3 global criteria that they would abide by if their products used GE ingredients. The 3rd criteria was that:

“The consumer should be effectively informed about the composition of products and should be convinced - also emotionally - of their quality and safety.”

The current company chairman clarified that this represents a commitment to labelling GE foods:

“We are also convinced that there must be transparency towards the consumer with regard to GM products, in the form of labelling but also by means of a dialogue about this technology.”

Indeed today the company’s global policy as explained on its website praises GE labeling:

“We believe consumers should have the necessary information they need to choose the food they wish to buy. We therefore support initiatives such as toll-free care lines, in-store leaflets, product information via web sites and the appropriate labeling of products. Labeling standards are important and we will continue to work with the relevant authorities and those in our industry to ensure that labeling is clear, informative and fair.

These are all fine words from Unilever. Yet the truth here in the Philippines is that neither Unilever nor its subsidiary Bestfoods, label the presence of GE ingredients – let alone offer the care lines, the in store leaflets or the GE-free guarantees that they provide to European and Australasian consumers.
Nestlé (Nesvita Natural Cereal Drink)

Nestlé, the world’s largest food company, is also reluctant to use genetically engineered foods in countries where consumers are more aware of the GE issue. Once an aggressive promoter of GE food and a member of the European pro-GE lobby group, Europa Bio, Nestlé has now banned the use of GE ingredients throughout its European brands:

- “The attitude of consumers towards genetic engineering in food in Germany and increasingly also in other countries is as critical as ever. Since our business success relies on the fulfillment of consumer wishes we will carry on to produce products without ingredients made from genetically engineered plants”
  Position paper published by Nestlé Germany, dated 11 May 1999

- “To summarize, we have removed from our products those ingredients that were likely to contain modified genetic material and are continuing to purchase from non-GM or Identity-Preserved sources, or to use substitutes where non-GM sourcing cannot be guaranteed.”
  Letter to Greenpeace from David Hudson
  Nestlé UK Communications and Corporate Affairs Director, 6th Oct 2000

These sentiments are not confined to Europe. Nestlé has also promised to remove GE ingredients from its brands in Hong Kong.

- “For Nestlé in Hong Kong, a majority of our products do not contain GMO ingredients. We are in the process of substituting GMO derived ingredients in any remaining products where possible and, when that is not possible, are purchasing from identity preserved (IP) supply channels. This is done by asking certification from our suppliers”
  Letter to Greenpeace from Nestlé Dairy Farm Hong Kong Ltd 8th February 2000

Like Unilever, Nestlé has also indicated its support for clear GE product labeling:

- “Our company supports clear and effective labeling when this can provide substantial information to consumers. Unclear wording such as ‘(may contain)’ or negative wording ‘(do not contain)’ demonstrates a non serious, responsible or honest approach to the issue.”

Here in the Philippines however, as Greenpeace tests show, Nestlé uses GE ingredients without bothering to label their products appropriately or inform their consumers.

PepsiCo – (Doritos Smokey Red Barbecue)

The international soft drink and snack food company PepsiCo is also very aware of GE food concerns. Indeed in May 2000 a resolution was submitted by PepsiCo shareholders asking PepsiCo to stop using genetically engineered ingredients worldwide. While the resolution was defeated, PepsiCo has nonetheless taken steps elsewhere to move away from the use of GE ingredients.

In Europe, PepsiCo’s position is very clear:

- “Ingredients used in our products are not derived from genetically modified sources”
  Letter from PEPSICO to a UK consumer - 18/5/99

This is specifically the case for the Doritos brand:

- “Given the current consumer debate over biotechnology, we are able to source our commodities without using genetically modified ingredients. We also require confirmation from our suppliers that their products do not contain genetically modified ingredients.”
  Statement from Mike Gale
  Walkers Snack Foods (who produce Doritos in the UK)
  in response to consumer enquiry concerning Doritos - Fri, 17 Nov 2000


In the United States, Doritos are manufactured by PepsiCo subsidiary Frito Lay. In early 2000, Frito requested that all its US corn growers not grow genetically engineered varieties. Frito-Lay spokeswoman Lynn Markley explained the company’s decision this way: “It's in the media every day. There's a lot of information out there. We want to step aside, sit on the sidelines, wait and see where the industry goes, see where the consumer confusion falls out.”

Here in the Philippines, however, Greenpeace tests show that Doritos still contains Genetically Engineered corn although it is not even labeled on the packet.

**Abbott (Isomil baby food)**

Abbott also appears to be operating double standards over whether their baby foods use Genetically Engineered Ingredients. In the UK, Abbot informs consumers that Isomil is a GE free product and indeed the product is sold without the GE label that would be required by law.

In a letter sent by Abbott to Greenpeace Netherlands, the Scientific Affairs director states “Along with this letter you will find an overview of our products sold in the Netherlands. All these products are free of GMOs”.

**Purefoods (Beefy hotdogs)**

Although Purefoods does not produce food outside the Philippines it does have a strategic alliance with international food producer Pillsbury. Purefoods also operates the Burger King chain in Philippines.

Here in the Philippines Purefoods uses GE ingredients in their products and do not even label their presence. Indeed Purefoods informed Greenpeace that as far as GE food goes “We do not have a policy on that”. In stark comparison are the responsible positions taken by Purefoods’ partners in other parts of the world:

- **Pillsbury**: “We hereby certify, for all our products, only using conventional (non GM) ingredients. We hereby certify for all our products, only using conventional (non GM) additives. This guarantee also applies to all derivatives, even those not subject to European labeling law.”

- **Burger King**: “Burger King has removed all genetically modified (GM) ingredients and all GM derivatives of soya and maize from its products in the EU and western Europe. We are also aware of concerns regarding GM crops used in animal feeds, and have therefore been surveying all our suppliers of meat, poultry, dairy and egg products to identify where GM feeds are used. From this survey we can develop appropriate plans to remove GM feeds as the opportunity arises. For example we are working with our EU based chicken suppliers to remove GM feeds, and expect to achieve this by early in 2001.”

**Consumers have a right to know and a right to say ‘no’**

In 1985, the United Nations crafted and approved guidelines for consumer protection which included the following eight basic rights:

1. **The right to the satisfaction of basic needs**: To have access to basic, essential goods and services, adequate and nutritious food, clothing, shelter, health care, education and sanitation.
2. **The right to safety**: To be protected against products, production processes and services that are hazardous to health or life.
3. **The right to be informed**: To be given facts needed to make an informed choice and to be protected against dishonest or misleading advertising and labeling.
4. **The right to choose**: To be able to select from a range of products and services, offered at competitive prices with an assurance of satisfactory quality.
5. **The right to be heard**: To have consumer interests represented in the making and enactment of government policy and in the development of products and services.

6. **The right to redress**: To receive a fair settlement of just claims, including compensation for misrepresentation, shoddy goods or unsatisfactory services.

7. **The right to consumer education**: To acquire the knowledge and skills needed to make informed, confident choices about goods and services while being aware of basic consumer rights and responsibilities and how to act on them.

8. **The right to a healthy and sustainable environment**: To live and work in an environment that is non-threatening to the well being of present and future generations.

These basic rights provide a framework for ensuring the protection and welfare of consumers worldwide. They have been used extensively in many countries as the basis for legislation and regulation involving the promotion of consumer welfare. In the Philippines, these very same rights are enshrined in the Consumer Act of 1992, and in other rules and regulations involving safety of food, drugs and other consumer items.

Regrettably however, these very same rights are the same ones being trampled upon by food manufacturers and corporations when they fail or refuse to inform the consuming public about the presence of genetically manipulated ingredients in their products. Four of these basic rights are especially relevant to the GE issue.

First, is the right to safety. Because genetic engineering is a novel and imprecise technology, it is too early at this stage to say what all the risks are, especially to consumers’ health. A precautionary approach to public health and safety necessitates that where risks are unknown, such products or processes should not be deployed into the open. Companies and food producers should realize that consumers may not be willing to sacrifice long-term issues of health and safety just to allow corporations to swiftly introduce new and unknown foods to the market before regulators have a chance to catch up.

Second and third, are the consumers’ right to know and their right to choose. While labeling does not fully address the concerns with GE ingredients, it at least allows the consumer to make informed choices and decisions. Information is no guarantee for safety. But full information about a product would enable and assist consumers who would want to take a precautionary approach in their food choices to do so. Labeling could also be used to trace and identify possible sources of any subsequent health problems arising from the consumption of a food product. Moreover, failure to provide information is considered a breach of fair trade. According to *Consumers International*, absence of labeling is a misleading, deceptive and unfair trade practice, which could bring detrimental results to sectors of the food industry.

Fourth is the right to a healthy and sustainable environment. Many concerns have already been raised on the irreversible and potentially far-reaching negative impacts of releasing GMOs into the environment. Once released, the potential for genetic pollution and damage to ecosystems cannot be underestimated. Consumers may want to use the power of their purses to effect a precautionary approach to protect the environment at the cash register. Indeed, if consumers do not want genetically modified products, why produce them in the first place. These concerns must also extend to animal feeds. After all, whether the manipulated crops are fed to humans or animals, the environmental impacts are the same.

**These 11 products are probably only the tip of the GE iceberg.**

Although Greenpeace tested 30 products of which just over a third contained genetically engineered soya or maize. It is probably safe to assume that these 11 brands represents only the tip of the iceberg in terms of all the genetically engineered foods and products to be found on supermarket shelves. This is because the products that have so far been genetically engineered, particularly soy, corn, canola and cotton, are found in most processed foods. The United States is the principle source of GE contamination worldwide and soy and corn in particular are imported from the United States into the Philippines in large quantities. So too are readymade consumer foods and snacks that could contain genetically engineered ingredients.
Soya:
Soya alone is a common ingredient in approximately sixty percent of all processed foods – it is used either as soy protein, soya flour, textured vegetable protein, soy oil, soy isolate or additives, emulsifiers and flavorings based on soy such as Soya lecithin. Foods that are likely to contain these soya ingredients include bread, baby food, sausages, ready made meals, beer, ice cream, margarine, chocolate, sauces, packet noodles, biscuits, tofu, soya milk and snacks.

At present 52% of the US soya crop is genetically engineered$^{ix}$ and this is largely mixed up with the non-GE crops. As a result, almost all US soya should be considered suspect. The Philippines was last year expected to import 450,000 metric tones of soybeans from the US representing around 95% of total soybean imports. The Philippines was also the no 1 importer globally of US soy meal (for animal feed) importing 585,000 metric tones. The Philippines also imports a small amount of US soya oil and some Canadian soya oil and soybeans that are also likely to be genetically engineered.$^{x}$

Corn
Corn is also found throughout the supermarket in processed food products. Indeed between them, soya and corn can be found in around 80 percent of processed foods. Ingredients to look out for that are derived from corn include corn flour, cornstarch, corn oil, maltodextrin and corn syrup. Examples of products that may contain corn include tortilla chips, ready meals, sauces, soups, sweets, soft drinks, pet food and even makeup and toothpaste. Around 25% of the US corn crop is genetically engineered$^{xii}$ but is also largely mixed up in the same way the soya crop is. According to the US department of Agriculture the Philippines imports approximately 550,000 metric tones of US corn per year.

Canola (rapeseed)
Canola oil is widely used as a vegetable oil in sauces, salad dressings, low cholesterol cooking oil and in ready-made meals.

Cotton
Although cottonseed is mostly fed to animals, cottonseed oil is also used for cooking, sauces and low quality food products. Cotton fiber of course is widely used in everything from clothes and diapers to sanitary towels, tampons and teabags.

US consumer food products
Like other commodities imported into the Philippines, there are also a large number of food products produced in the United States and exported readily packaged into the country either directly from the USA or transshipped via Taiwan and Hong Kong. Given the widespread growing of GE crops in the US many of these imported consumer food products are likely to contain GE ingredients.

According to the US Department of Agriculture, $218.7million dollars worth of US consumer food products were exported to the Philippines in 2000 making the Philippines the largest market in ASEAN and the 11th most important market worldwide for US consumer foods. The largest sectors were imported snack foods and dairy products.$^{xii}$ Greenpeace maintains a list of US food products arranged by producers who do and do not use genetically engineered ingredients. This is called the ‘True Food shopping list’ and can be viewed online at www.truefoodnow.org.

The case of Starlink.
While Greenpeace only tested for specific varieties of genetically engineered soya and corn, it is also likely that further testing may have uncovered other varieties. One such variety that has proven to be controversial is Starlink corn, genetically engineered by Aventis agrochemical company to contain a protein called Cry9C. This protein is thought to have allergenic properties. Although Starlink was not approved for human food use in the US, it was discovered last October in a wide range of US consumer foods produced by Kraft, Kelloggs, Mission foods and Safeways and causing a general...
recall of millions of products. The United States Department of Agriculture, while engaging in a very expensive buyback programme of the contaminated stocks also deregulated Starlink for export – effectively sending the problem abroad. When Starlink’s Cry9C protein turned up in Japan, their government refused to allow contaminated US corn shipments into their country. In contrast, the Philippine government did not even bother to check for Starlink corn imports, when this scandal broke out. Hinting that Starlink may be in the Philippine food chain the US Department of Agriculture notes:

“The issue of Starlink corn, a GMO corn used for feed but inadvertently found its way to the US food chain did not cause much alarm in the Philippines. The domestic feed milling industry has been relatively quiet with regards to biotechnology derived feed grains.”

More questions. More tests.

These eleven GE contaminated products represent only the first batch of testing that Greenpeace has undertaken in the Philippines for the presence of genetically engineered food. Greenpeace will now be urgently contacting food manufacturers to clarify whether or not they use GE ingredients and we will be undertaking further tests of these and other brands.

Shocking lack of government regulation.

A review by Greenpeace of laws and regulations in the Philippines relating to the issue of GMOs shows that at present, there is no existing Philippine legislation governing the import, use or labeling of genetically engineered food and crops. Although there have been a series of bills and resolutions filed in the House of Representatives and in the Senate requiring labels on GE food and asking for a moratorium on GE food imports, all of them are currently stagnating in the Committees where they have been referred to. This includes a bill introduced by the now Secretary of Agriculture Leonardo Q. Montemayor, which requires the mandatory labeling of GE foods.

Since assuming office, President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo has indicated that her government will not follow the blatant pro-GE policy of the previous administrations, which has resulted in the utter lack of safety regulations in this area. Agriculture Secretary Montemayor confirmed to Businessworld “Before commercialization of GM seeds will be allowed, seed companies must first prove that GM crops will have no adverse effects on human health and the environment. He also said that the country must first establish a system of labeling to ensure that consumers and users of such products can make an informed choice on the consumption of GM commodities.”

In a roundtable discussion on March 6th 2001 held at the Department of Agriculture, Secretary Montemayor further stated that GM foods should undergo strict regulation including toxicological studies.

Greenpeace has written to the President asking for a timetable to set-up and implement these regulations. In the meantime it is now clear that that GE foods are already entering the Philippines and ending up in the dinner tables of Filipinos without a safety review, without toxicological studies and without any requirements to label and inform the consuming public. This shocking lack of government regulation is irresponsible and is in stark contrast to the pro-public health and safety stance adopted by other governments worldwide.

Moreover, the implementing rules in the Consumer Act of 1992 (RA 7394), as well as the regulations governing the implementation of consumer welfare provisions of the same law by the Bureau of Food and Drugs (BFAD) currently do not recognize the threats associated with GM food products. While the provisions of RA 7394 are meant to guarantee the rights of the Filipino consumer against deceptive acts and practices, as well as to safeguard her rights to obtain accurate information as to “the nature, quality and quantity of the contents of consumer products”, the spirit and intent of these important provisions are effectively lost if not blatantly disregarded with the de-facto force feeding of GE food to unsuspecting Filipino consumers.
On the other hand in the international arena, the Philippine government is one of the signatories of the Cartegena Protocol on Biosafety under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity. As a signatory, the government is obligated to initiate the ratification of this Protocol by the Philippine Senate, to help facilitate its entry into force. The government is likewise duty bound to establish regulations governing the import and traceability of GE products. xxvii As the following section will show, most responsible governments are already doing this.

**A selection of global regulatory requirements covering the use of GE Food.**

**Algeria**

On December 24, 2000, Algeria introduced a draft ministerial order “to prohibit the import, the distribution, the commercialization and the utilization of genetically modified plant material” xxviii

**Australia and New Zealand**

The Australian New Zealand Food Authority (ANZFA) is responsible for scrutinizing new GE foods intended for the market. Australia and New Zealand have adopted a labeling regime for genetically modified foods that will come into force in July 2001. xxix

**Brazil**

In 1998 Greenpeace won an injunction saying that no genetically engineered Roundup Ready (RR) soya may enter the country before there are proper labeling rules in place. In August 1999 a federal judge of the Court of Brasilia upheld this decision and decided in favor of another Greenpeace injunction against the planting of RR soya. The need for labeling rules was reconfirmed by the Federal Court of Brasilia in June 2000 but at this time there are still no such rules implemented.

**Czech Republic**

Labeling of GE foods will be required from 2002. Otherwise Czech law is being enacted to harmonize with EU regulations covering GE food. xxx

**European Union**

The EU Novel Food regulation regulates the marketing and labelling of products which are genetically engineered or derived from GE organisms. An additional labelling regulation applies to Roundup Ready soya and Syngenta Bt maize requiring labelling of food products in which the DNA or the new protein of GE-crops is detectable. In April 2000 additives and aromas were added to the labeling regulation if DNA is detectable in the end product. xxxi

Regulations for GE animal feed and products from animals which were fed on GE feed is planned and under discussion.

Although some GMOs such as Roundup Ready Soya, Aventis rapeseed oil and Syngenta Bt maize have clearance for use in food products. There is currently a de facto moratorium on any new GE product approvals while EU ministers tighten regulations. Portugal, Luxembourg, Austria and Germany have further banned Syngenta Bt maize while France and Greece have banned Aventis rapeseed. The EU is planning to improve labeling and make traceability of products mandatory.

**Hong Kong**

In January 2000 the Legislative Council of Hong Kong supported a motion demanding mandatory labelling of GE products with a 39 out of 47 majority. Now the Government has set up a task force to draft the details of a comprehensive labelling system. The proposal is expected to be reviewed by the Legislative Council later this year. xxxi Public consultations in this regard are now being undertaken.
Israel
Israel's ministry of health is preparing regulations for the labeling of GMO's. They will require that food be labeled if it contains more than 1% of GMO components, and otherwise will be similar to the EU regulations concerning GMOs.

Japan
The Government of Japan currently operates a voluntary safety review for genetically engineered products. This review will become mandatory on April 1, 2001. Japan will also adopt mandatory labeling for certain GE products at the same time.

Republic of Korea
The Korean government will begin requiring mandatory labeling for GE foods from 1st March with strict enforcement from 1st September 2001. Those selling food are expected to show certification documents as to the GE status of their products. Anyone found to be falsely labeling would face a 3-year jail sentence or 30 million won fine. Those who fail to label will face a 10 million won fine.

Mexico
In March 2000 the upper house of Mexico's Senate unanimously approved a health bill that would require GE foodstuffs to be labeled. Foods containing GE ingredients would need to carry labels reading "Food made with genetically modified products." The law is awaiting approval by the Chamber of Deputies.

Norway
The government has banned the import of several GE crops and products, which contain antibiotic resistance genes. The government also requires labeling of GE foods.

Paraguay
The use of GMO's in Paraguay's agricultural sector is banned in 2000/2001 specifically soya beans.

Poland
The Polish government announced in April 2000 that all genetically modified food products would have to be labeled. The Ministry of Environmental Protection decided that the information should be on the package in easy-to-read captions in contrasting colors.

Russia
Russia instituted a GE consumer product labeling law on July 1st, 2000. Food and medical products derived from GE sources that contain GE proteins must be labeled. Information on GE sources must also be included in shipping documents.

Saudi Arabia
The government has banned animal products that are made from Genetically Engineered organisms and has also implemented very strict labeling requirements for GE foods to come into force December 2001. GE foods must be marked with a triangle and a warning in both Arabic and English. GE foods entering the country must also be accompanied by a health certificate.

Switzerland
Food products, including additives, and animal feed stuffs which are or contain genetically altered matter have to be labeled as 'genetically modified organism' or 'contain genetically modified organism'. As of January 2000, Switzerland is the first country where drugs containing GMOs must be labeled.

Taiwan
The Taiwanese government presented an outline of new labeling regulations on November 29, 2000. Under the proposal mandatory labeling will be established for all GE food products. The regulation will first apply to maize and soybeans and later on also to other agricultural products.
Greenpeace Demands

The fact that genetically manipulated food products are now ending up in the food tables of Filipinos, without their knowledge and consent should jumpstart the relevant government authorities to start implementing an honest to goodness system that would give greater weight to the welfare of the consumer rather than the profit margins of food companies and their sources. The fact that governments of other countries have taken responsible action in the interest of their consumers and the environment by setting-up import bans and implementing mandatory labeling systems for GE food -- should force the Philippine government to rethink if not altogether abandon the corporate compliant pro-GMO policy being pushed by some sectors within and outside the government. The international rights of consumers are basic civil privileges that all consumers are entitled to. The Filipino consumer deserves no less.

Greenpeace demands that the Philippine government:

1. Immediately implement a full and strict labeling system for ingredients derived from genetically modified organisms or GMOs (based on provenance not just testing).
2. Act swiftly and decisively to remove GE food from the nation’s food supply. This requires the government’s ratification of the Biosafety Protocol and the approval of enabling GMO legislation based on the precautionary principle.

Greenpeace also calls on food companies:

1. To label their products with ingredients currently derived from GE sources.
2. To commit to remove GE food and establish sourcing of Non-GE ingredients for their products.

For food outlets and retailers, Greenpeace asks that they demand segregation and certification of food products from their suppliers in the interest of consumer access to non-GE food. To ensure transparency they must support the implementation of labeling programs and policies within their establishments.

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0 “Montemayor open to commercialization of GM crops” BusinessWorld (Philippines). February 14, 2001
1 In this report Genetically Engineered, Genetically Modified, Genetically Manipulated, and Genetically Altered are considered synonymous.
ii “Japanese Non-GMO Soybean Futures” 7/12/00 www.cropchoice.com
iv (Morris Tabaksblat, Unilever says gene food is weapon against hunger By Christopher Lyddon ROTTERDAM, Oct 16 (Reuters)
vii (Morris Tabaksblat: Chairman of Unilever NV Veerstichting Symposium Pieterskerk, Leiden 17 October 1997).
ix See www.unilever.com - statement on Biotechnology.
xi Letter from Nestlé Greece to Greenpeace 21/07/1999.
xii Fooling with Mother Nature; Plano-based Frito-Lay finds it’s better to be safe than sorry with genetically Dallas Observer February 10, 2000.

xiii Telephone Conversation between Emma Gibson of Greenpeace UK and Abbott labs UK.
ixv See http://www.purefoods.com.ph/

D.J. Phillips, Director of Technology, Pillsbury Europe. Declaration to Greenpeace 29/3/00.

Letter to Greenpeace from Jon Banks, Burger King Europe, Middle East and Africa - 22 Nov 2000.


USDA GAIN Report #RP0029 05/01/2000 “Philippines Oilseeds and products Annual 2000”.

See xvi.


For a good overview of the Starlink story see www.cropchoice.com


“No to GMO tests” – Philippine Star 14 Feb 2001 p14.


For details on the implications of the Cartageno protocol on biosafety see greenpeace briefings available from www.greenpeace.org/~geneng.

Declaration of Minister of Agriculture, 24th Dec 2000 - Democratic Peoples Republic of Algeria.


Commission regulation 50/2000 of 10 January 2000 on the labelling of foodstuffs and food ingredients containing additives and flavourings that have been genetically modified or have been produced from genetically modified organisms.


South China Morning Post (1 April 2000) “GM Food Labelling Policies Imminent”

Israel to adopt GMO labeling http://www.oryza.com/global/genetic/index.shtml


USDA GAIN report #PA0007 6/23/2000 “Paraguay Biotechnology – Paraguay Renews GMO Planting restrictions”


USDA FAS attaché report – Dec 4 2000 “Taiwan | Bioengineered Food Labeling Proposal “