GREENPEACE

genetic engineering

Genetic engineering in our food and environment is unnecessary, unpredictable and poses serious threats to ecosystems and risks to our health.

What is genetic engineering?

Genetic engineering (GE) is when genes from plants, animals or bacteria are inserted into plants or animals in a laboratory to create new organisms that would not occur naturally. Using GE, genes from bacteria, viruses, plants and animals have been inserted into soya beans, canola, corn and cotton. These "genetically modified organisms" or "GMOs" are now being used in the food we buy.

No GE crops are grown commercially in New Zealand, though some field trials have been approved.

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What's wrong with GE?

GE organisms are living so can spread, reproduce and cause problems to the environment. The release of GE organisms to the environment is irreversible. This is why Greenpeace is against GE organisms being released into our fields or used in our food.

There are still no long-term studies looking into the health impacts of GE food. The short-term studies that have been done on animals give serious cause for concern.

The cultivation of GE crops places the control of our food supply into the hands of a few giant multinational chemical companies. The patents on GE crops prevent farmers from saving seed, as they have done for thousands of years.

Solutions

We can rely on agriculture that works with nature rather than against it. Organic agriculture and other forms of sustainable farming can ensure food safety and security for all, while at the same time protecting our environment. The recent United Nations' International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for Development found that we urgently need to move away from destructive and chemical-dependent industrial agriculture. It recommends we adopt environmentally responsible modern farming methods that support biodiversity and benefit local communities.

Feeding the world?

An often repeated claim of the biotechnology industry is that we need GE crops to feed the world. However, despite industry claims, there is little evidence that GE crops increase yield. Other technologies are available to help us deal with global challenges such as food security and climate change. For example, drought resistant crops have already been developed using traditional plant breeding and modern biotechnology techniques that don't pose the same risks as genetic engineering.

A main motivation for companies to genetically engineer seed has been to sell more herbicide by making plants herbicide resistant and patent and own the DNA of the seed, so they can collect a royalty when they are used.

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What Greenpeace is doing

- Making submissions opposing applications for the trial and release of GE organisms in our environment
- Alerting and mobilisng our tens of thousands of supporters to take action to protect NZ from GE.

Greenpeace GE wins

June 2009 The New Zealand High Court stops AgResearch's application to release numerous genetic experiments involving genes from (amongst others) possums, goats and people.

February 2009 The field trial of GE brassicas (cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower and kale) growing at Lincoln near Christchurch is pulled out. The trial was 'accidentally' allowed to flower, breaching numerous conditions set by the government run Environmental Risk Management Authority (ERMA) when it granted the application.

2004 After years of pressure from environmental groups, consumers and cyberactivists, agribusiness giant Monsanto announces a suspension of open field trials and further development of its genetically engineered 'Roundup Ready' wheat.

2003 Although the government ignores huge public opposition and lifts the moratorium on growing GE crops, none have been commercially grown in New Zealand.

What can you do?

The power to keep our food GE-free lies with all of us. The vast majority of GE crops remain confined to just three countries (the United States, Argentina and Brazil), despite a decade of aggressive lobbying by the GE industry. That's thanks to global action by shoppers, farmers, Greenpeace and our allies.

In New Zealand, GE food is sneaking into our shopping trolleys unlabelled.

No GE fruit, vegetables or meat are sold in New Zealand. However, animals can be fed on feed like soya that is genetically engineered so it's best to buy organic and free-range meat, poultry, dairy products and eggs.

Processed foods can legally contain GE ingredients and are inadequately labeled in Greenpeace's view. So avoid products like canola oil and soya unless they are labeled as GE-free. Growing your own organic food is the best way to be in control of your food chain and it's fun!

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