

PRESS RELEASE BY THE AFRICAN CENTRE FOR BIOSAFETY

FOOD FASCISM IN SOUTH AFRICA: TIGER BRANDS, PIONEER AND PREMIER FORCE FEEDING THE NATION RISKY GM MAIZE

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The ACB has today, released test results on the most extensively consumed maize brands in South Africa, which indicate that the entire maize supply is utterly saturated with GM maize. “The majority of South Africans are not only eating GM maize without their knowledge and consent but have no choice or alternative whatsoever even if the products were correctly labelled. This is totally undemocratic and unacceptable. It smacks of outright food fascism” said Mariam Mayet, Director of the African Centre for Biosafety.

South Africa is the only country in the world to permit the cultivation of genetically modified (GM) seed for the production of a staple food-maize. 86% of the 2012/13 maize crop was planted to GM seed on 2.7 million ha. 81% of the white maize seed sold was GM-and belonging to Monsanto. GM white maize is used principally as milled maize meal for human consumption and eaten by several million South Africans as a staple food, at least once a day.

Three major food producers **Tiger Brands, Pioneer Foods and Premier Foods** control the milling of 60% of the nation’s white maize crop. Milled maize products, **Ace, White Star and Iwisa Super Maize Meal** belonging to **Tiger Brands, Pioneer Foods, and Premier**, respectively, constitute over 73% of the maize meal market respectively.

The test results are as follows:

- **Premier’s Iwisa 81.2% GM content (labelled as ‘contains genetically modified organisms’)** October 2013;
- **Pioneer’s White Star Super Maize meal 72,04% GM maize content (labelled as “produced using genetic modification”)** October 2013;
- **Premier’s course braai pap, 55.22% GM maize content (labelled as “may contain genetically modified organisms”)** October 2013;
- **Premier’s Nyala Super Maize Meal, 87.44% GM maize content (labelled as “contains genetically modified organisms”)** March 2013;
- **Woolworth’s Super Maize meal, 79.78% GM maize content (labelled as “may be genetically modified”)** March 2013.

“We are hugely taken aback and disappointed by the test results for the **Woolworths’ Maize Meal** as this high GM content and misleading labelling flies in the face of their stated position. Woolworths is on record as stating that their policy is to replace or remove ingredients derived from GM crop sources, or to label the final products containing ingredients derived from GM crops, to ensure customer choice,” said Zakiyya Ismail, ACB’s consumer awareness campaigner.

Pioneer’s ‘White Star’ super maize meal corners 25.3% of the market, Tiger Brand’s ‘Ace’ super maize meal 22.5%, Premier Foods flagship brand ‘Iwisa’ 13.3%, and when combined with sales of its other brands ‘Impala’ maize meal and ‘Nyala’ maize, Premier lays claim to a hefty 25.5% of the market.¹

The ACB has during June 2013 also subjected several Tiger Brands’ ‘ACE’ milled maize products for testing and these were unlabelled and showed extremely high GM content:

- ACE Super maize meal **78%** GM maize content
- ACE Maize Rice **70%** GM maize content
- ACE Instant Porridge **68%** GM maize content

The ACB has also during March 2012, subjected **Premier's** Impala maize meal to testing and 66.18% GM content was found. This was unlabelled at the time of testing in March 2012.

Animal feeding studies have shown Bt maize causes liver and kidney damage in rats, mice and sheep,² and severe stomach inflammation in pigs.³ Further, approximately 64% of the GM maize grown in South Africa is tolerant to glyphosate, a broad spectrum herbicide associated with a plethora of health risks to human, animal and environmental health. "It is very disturbing that South Africans are unknowingly consuming staple foods whose safety has not been established and where evidence of its potential harm is becoming increasingly apparent," said Ismail.

Despite the safety risks, Tiger Brands has refused point blank to provide GM free food to the South African public. However, it has expediently, caved in to consumer pressure and have agreed to use non-GM ingredients in its Purity brand of baby foods after test results showed these to contain high GM content. These baby foods were also unlabelled.

An Open Letter sent by the ACB to the National Chamber of Milling in July 2013, as the representative body for the milling industry in South Africa, calling upon it to ensure the establishment of GM free value chains has been ignored. Instead, the National Chamber of Milling has entered into a strategic partnership with Africabio, the lobby group dedicated to the promotion of GMOs in Africa.

Regulations for the labelling of GM food are currently still not enforced. The Department of Trade and Industry has been dragging its heels to provide consumers with the right to choose. "However, labelling laws will not assist consumers of maize meal as they have absolutely no choice but to be forced fed with risky GM maize. Tiger Brands, Premier and Pioneer are holding the health of South African consumers ransom by their failure to provide non-GM alternatives," said Mayet.

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¹ <http://www.saarf.co.za/amps-branded/2012/cd-2012b-products/> (accessed 09/07/2013)

² ACB (2012). **Supporting documentation to the African civil society statement calling for a ban on GMOs in Africa: Health, environmental, socio-economic impacts of GMOs. Sixteen years of broken promises.** <http://acbio.org.za/images/stories/dmdocuments/AU-submission-referenced-report.pdf>

³ Judy A. Carman, Howard R. Vlieger, Larry J. Ver Steeg, Verlyn E. Sneller, Garth W. Robinson, Catherine A. Clinch-Jones, Julie I. Haynes, John W. Edwards (2013). **A long-term toxicology study on pigs fed a combined genetically modified (GM) soy and GM maize diet.** *Journal of Organic Systems* 8 (1): 38-54. <http://www.organic-systems.org/journal/81/8106.pdf>