Rejection of GM Potatoes by African Consumers and Importers

Taking into account that South Africa's Agriculture and Research Council (ARC) has announced their intention to apply to the SA government for permission to make GM potatoes commercially available,

We, the undersigned consumers and importers of potatoes, hereby vehemently oppose the marketing and growing of GMO potatoes and implore the SA GMO council to reject the application outright, on the following grounds:

Health Concerns

There is no consumer confidence in the long-term safety of GM potatoes and they pose no benefit to the consumer. Problems with Bt genes that have been commercialised in the past have included immune reactions, impacts on organ weight and function and allergic reactions.

Additionally, the use of antibiotic resistant marker genes poses an unacceptable risk to the health of Africans. There is a possibility that the use of these genes could diminish the efficacy of antibiotics such as Kanamycin, a drug that is listed in the WHO Essential Medicines Library as a drug reserved for treating multi-drug resistant tuberculosis.

There is no reason for consumers to take the risk of eating a novel food for the sake of storage requirements for farmers.

Force feeding fellow Africans with dangerous food

ARC's GM potato work is funded by USAID, which is well known for their tactics to push US corporate interests in GM in Africa. They are up front about their goal to "integrate GM into local food systems" through their Agricultural Biotechnology Support Project (ABSP).

Ninety percent of South Africa's export potato crop goes to its neighbours in SADC, where many have imposed bans or biosafety restrictions on GM food. ARC's GM potatoes will force feed fellow Africans with food that they have neither asked for nor have a say in.

GM Potatoes won't help African farmers

GM potatoes are located within the "Green Revolution" package for Africa that proffers technical and economic solutions for African agriculture. These solutions, designed by transnational agribusiness, create dependence on hi-tech, capital-intensive technology that is inappropriate for small-scale farmers. Public research money would be better used on enhancing more appropriate agricultural systems that ensure local food security, adaptability to changing climates and local control over resources.

African farmers face the loss of their markets and control over their farming systems if South Africa paves the way for the introduction of GM potatoes onto the continent.

Biosafety Concerns

The developers claim that GM potatoes are better for our health & the environment because they reduce pesticide spraying, but this is not true. GM potatoes are engineered with an inbuilt pesticide to control the tuber moth, which is most destructive during storage. The pesticide is now inside the plant and farmers will still use a toxic cocktail of chemicals to combat all the other 99 pests, as well as viral, fungal & bacterial diseases, and weeds that plague potato farming in South Africa.

Furthermore because the Bt toxin is expressed 24 hours a day, it accumulates in the environment and throughout the food chain. The tuber moth will quickly develop resistance to the toxin, so this is a short-term and short-sighted solution to this problem.

GM potatoes will easily spread throughout the continent – a pocket of potatoes bought for consumption can be transported across borders and ultimately be planted in places where they have not been approved and cannot be traced. This will impact on each country's sovereign right to decide on whether or not they want to accept GM potatoes, as well as impact on their Biosafety.