African Centre for Biosafety
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Failed Application for Contained Use of Genetically Modified flowers and bulbs involving Ornithogalum dubium x thyrsoides Line A2

The South African GMO Authority, the Executive Council (EC), established under the GMO Act has refused the first ever application for experimentation of GM bulbs and flowers outside a laboratory facility.

According to the applicant, Afriflowers, a plant breeder, the Executive Council was not satisfied that adequate safety information had been furnished to justify the approval.

If granted, Afriflowers would have been permitted to grow for the first year, approximately 10 000 genetically modified bulbs and flowers involving hybrid lines, *Ornithogalum dubium* x *thyrosoides*, genetically engineered to resist the Ornithogalum mosaic virus. The experiments were meant to take place in a 10 x 6 meter shade/virus netting structure.

The ultimate beneficiary targeted by this type of experimentation is the lucrative horticulture industry, which is geared towards the export of cut flowers. Approximately 95 % of South Africa's cut flowers are exported to the Netherlands.

Ornithogalum dubium, also known as the Sun Star, is a perennial bulbous flowering plant of the family *Hyacinthaceae* and is native to South Africa (Cape Province). *Ornithogalum thyrsoides*, commonly known as the wonder-flower and star-of Bethlehem, occurs in the Northern and Western Cape Provinces and its distribution extends from Namaqualand to Caledon.

Although Afriflowers is the named applicant, the Agriculture Research Council (Roodeplaat) is responsible for the transformation.

This is the third 'contained use' application turned down by the EC in the past year. Earlier, two contained use applications involving GM sorghum had been turned down on biosafety grounds. This year, ARC's application to field test GM cassava was turned down.

It is not clear whether Afriflowers will resubmit its application. If it does, the public may be kept in the dark, as the GMO Act does not require the public to be informed of contained use applications.