

## **PRESS RELEASE FROM AFRICAN CENTRE FOR BIOSAFETY AND SAFEAGE**

5 APRIL 2011, Johannesburg, and Cape Town, South Africa.

The African Centre for Biosafety and SAFEAGE cautiously welcome the mandatory labeling regime established by the regulations made in terms of the Consumer Protection Act for GM food. According to Mariam Mayet of the ACB, “the mandatory labeling regime holds the promise of bringing to an end an era where consumers were deliberately kept in the dark about what they are eating.” Mayet, however cautions that the “regulations are fraught with legal uncertainties and ambiguities, which may give rise to interpretation problems, particularly with regard to the scope of the law.”

The groups also express concern that consumers could be faced with up to five labels on GM foods, owing to attempts by government to appease agribusiness. According to Fahrie Hassan of SAFAGE, “the labeling regime represents a compromise package, which allows industry to opt for labels where testing for GM content is undertaken, as well as for labels where no testing is required. This may result in consumers being confused about what the differences are between the various labels.”

From the 1 October 2011, food producers, importers and packagers will be required to choose one of three mandatory labels for GM foods and marketing materials. Where the GM content is at least 5%, the food will be labeled as ‘containing GMOs.’ Where the food is produced directly from GMO sources, there will be no need for testing, and food must be labeled as ‘produced using genetic modification’. Industry may also opt for ‘may contain GMOs’ labels in circumstances where they are able to argue that it is scientifically impractical and not feasible to test food for GM content. This provides industry with broad latitude to circumvent the labelling regime and the need for testing and in so doing, undermine consumer choice. According to Hassan: “We find this totally unacceptable.”

“ We support extensive public education and awareness programmes aimed at explaining to consumers what these different labels mean to them and hope that the Consumer Commission will assist with this task and ensure that groups such as ours, have a meaningful role to play in such a process,” said Hassan.

2 voluntary labels are also permissible; one denoting that the food “does not contain GMOs”, where the GM content is 0.9% or less and the other, stating that the “GM content is less than 5%”, where the GM content is between 1% and 4.9%. Few food products are likely to be labeled as not containing GMOs owing to the widespread contamination in South Africa between GM and non- GM food.

“We will remain vigilant and challenge labeling claims to safeguard the consumers Right to Know,” said Mayet.

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