

Press Release – The African Centre for Biosafety

15th October 2010, Johannesburg

WATCHDOG CONDEMNS MOVES TO INCLUDE MAIZE IN BIOFUELS STRATEGY

The African Centre for Biosafety (ACB) is deeply concerned about the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF), Tina Joemat-Petersson's statements on 8th of October 2010 that South Africa's biofuels strategy should be revised to include maize. The Minister's stance has been influenced by the huge surplus of conventional and GM maize produced by South African farmers this season and the difficulty encountered by them to find markets for this maize.ⁱ Nevertheless, the Minister's position reneges on prior government commitments to exclude the use of maize for biofuels because of food security reasons.

The ACB further notes with extreme disquiet the vociferous lobbying taking place by industry and the Portfolio Committee on Energy to have maize included as a biofuel feedstock.

The ACB has been closely monitoring South Africa's huge maize surpluses, which has done nothing to alleviate the plight of millions of South Africans living below the poverty line. "The looming financial crisis among South African maize farmers further attests to the folly of mortgaging the country's future on the mass production of global commodities that can be bought and sold at the whim of financial speculators" said African Centre for Biosafety (ACB) Director, Mariam Mayet.

Haidee Swanby of the ACB expressed dismay at the suggested change to the Biofuel Strategy, stating that "the use of maize as feedstock for agrofuels has contributed to massive hikes in the price of food on the global market. The 2008 global food crisis was largely attributable to the diversion of maize in the US to ethanol production. "

The ACB released a detailed critical analysis of the South African National Biofuel Strategy when it was released in 2007ⁱⁱ, pointing out that the so-called 'green energy' strategy was a blatant attempt to open up 'marginal' lands in the former homelands to an industrialised agricultural model that has led us all towards climate chaos and chronic global hunger.

"The proposed policy shift is extremely short sighted and reactive; we need real solutions to energy and food security. It's time our government began to support environmentally sound agricultural practices for local consumption rather than chemical intensive mono-crops destined for global markets." said Swanby.

'Civil society and local communities will continue to strongly oppose any attempts to compromise food security and risk increases in food prices in order to protect the interests of the agro-fuel lobby,' concluded Mayet.

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ⁱ For more information please refer to the ACB publications 'A good neighbor? South Africa forcing GM maize onto African markets and policy makers', and 'The dirty politics of the global grain trade: GM maize farmers face ruin in SA'. Both available at www.biosafetyafrica.org.za

ⁱⁱ See for example: <http://biosafetyafrica.org.za/index.php/20090128191/Agrofuels-in-South-Africa-projects-players-and-poverty/menu-id-100027.html>