

Are Food Producers Abandoning GMOs in Breakfast Cereals but Force-Feeding Risky GM Staple Food to South Africans?

PRESS RELEASE FROM THE AFRICAN CENTRE FOR BIODIVERSITY (ACB)

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The African Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) has re-tested **4 popular maize milled** products as well as **16 baby and breakfast cereals** containing maize and/or soya ingredients in order to gauge the extent to which food producers are responding to consumer pressure (see Tables 1 and 2 below). The latest results reveal that the four food companies that control our maize milled market—Premier, Tiger Brands, Foodcorp and Pioneer—remain intransigent and are determined to force feed South African consumers with risky GM maize. The re-test results show an overall increase in the percentage of GM maize in the popular maize brands.¹ The average amount of GM maize in a packet of maize meal is now 80%.

Test results on re-tested milled maize

The latest results of maize meal samples tested by the University of Free State's GM Testing Laboratory reveal:

- Premier's Iwisa Maize Meal contains 91% GM Maize—up by 10 percentage points in 2013
- Tiger Brand's Ace Maize Meal contains 87% GM Maize—up by 9 percentage points in 2013
- Foodcorp's Tafelberg Maize Meal contains 88% GM Maize—up by 27 percentage points from 2014
- Pioneer's White Star Maize Meal contains 55% GM Maize—down by 17 percentage points from 2013 but up by 7 percentage points from 2014

With regard to the **baby cereals market**, the ACB tested 2 products, Tiger Brand's Purity Nutripak and Nestle's Cerelac Maize and found that these contain very low levels of GM maize. The test results of the **14 processed breakfast** cereals vary considerably. While popular brands such as Pronutro Wheatfree, Nestle Milo and Cheerios all showed very low percentages of GM maize—low enough not to trigger required labelling of 5% GM content—others, such as Bokomo Oatees and Tiger Brand Jungle Ultra, still contain high levels of GM ingredients. However, **8 brands** of corn flakes were tested and showed either no GM content or unquantifiable GM or very low levels that would not trigger labelling.

According to Zakiyya Ismail, Consumer Campaigner for the ACB, “Given that around

¹ See ACB's 2013 Press Release on the saturation of GM Maize in popular brands; <http://www.acbio.org.za/index.php/media/64-media-releases/445-food-fascism-in-south-africa-tiger-brands-pioneer-and-premier-force-feeding-the-nation-risky-gm-maize>

87% of the total maize crop planted in SA in 2014 was GM maize, these results point to one of two scenarios. Either food producers in South Africa have turned away from using ingredients derived from GMOs for breakfast cereals, or there are fundamental flaws in the way that the labelling of food products derived from GMOs is approached.”

Tests on processed cereals revealed the following:

- Pioneer's Bokomo Pronutro Wheatfree contained **3.18% GM maize; GM soya was not detected**
- Pioneer's Bokomo Pronutro Toddlers Apple and Banana contained **18% GM maize and 15% GM soya**
- Pioneer's Bokomo Oatees contained **46% GM maize**
- Tiger Brands Jungle Energy contained **57% GM maize; GM soya was detected but at a level too low to quantify**
- Nestle's Milo Cereal contained **GM maize but this was below the level of quantification**
- Nestle's Cheerios contained **0.52% GM maize**
- Kellogg's Corn Flakes Porridge contained **1.56% GM maize**
- Kellogg's Corn Flakes contained **GM maize but the level was not quantifiable due to low copies of DNA**
- Pioneer's Bokomo Corn Flakes **contained GM maize but the level was not quantifiable due to low copies of DNA**
- Pick n Pay, Heartlands, Spar, Woolworths and Checkers cornflakes —**GM maize not detected**
- Tiger Brand's Purity Nutripak contained **GM maize but below the level of quantification**
- Nestle's Cerelac Maize contained **0.45% GM maize.**

Fundamental flaws in the approach to labelling GM food

Corn flakes and highly processed cereals are notorious for not providing accurate readings with regard to GM content. In South Africa and the rest of the world, the inability to detect GM maize in most corn flakes products is most likely due to the intense thermal processing which tends to denature the protein which, in turn, makes it difficult to detect transgenic DNA. “Inconsistencies in the SA test results make it difficult to draw definitive conclusions that these products are not derived from GMOs,” said Ismail.

Haidee Swanby, senior researcher at the ACB, is of the opinion that, “These results indicate an urgent need for proper legislation to regulate the labelling of processed products, based on the source of the ingredients used rather than relying on arbitrary thresholds and whether or not GM content can be detected. Such an approach would be consistent with the objectives and imperatives of the Consumer

Protection Act, as it would provide more accurate information to the consumer. However, government appears to have succumbed to industry pressure and has stalled on finalising the amendments to the 2011 labelling regulations.”

GM food landscape

Since the ACB first started testing food products in 2012, and sharing these results with South African consumers, GM foods within the processed food market have changed considerably. The GM status of three products—Pronutro Wheatfree, Nestle Cerelac and Futurelife Original—has altered substantially, from high GM maize and soya levels to low or no GM. Futurelife has moved to using non-GM maize and soya in its products. Nestle too has bowed to consumer demands and announced that it will no longer use GM maize in its baby cereals. Pioneer's Bokomo Wheatfree Pronutro revealed a GM maize content of only 3.18% while no GM soya was detected; this is in sharp contrast to the 2012 result of 90% GM maize and 71% GM soya. Pioneer Foods has entered into an agreement to acquire a 50% shareholding in Futurelife, which may signal Pioneer's intention to move into the non-GM “smart food” market.

South Africa's cereal market is worth R4.2 billion and is dominated by Pioneer Foods, Nestle, Tiger Brands and Kelloggs. Of these four major players, Pioneer Foods and Tiger Brands are also dominant in the maize milling market and thus have a greater amount of control over the kind of maize they use in their products. Tiger Brands has honoured its commitment to not using GM content in its baby cereals, only, but are pointedly ignoring consumer demands for non-GM maize meal for the majority of the people in this country.

While baby food and other cereals that cater to middle and upper income earners appear to contain either no GM content or increasingly less GM, the majority of South Africans —many millions who live below the breadline and for whom maize meal is a staple food —have to endure even higher levels of GM maize. At least 69% of GM maize crops are sprayed with glyphosate, a chemical which the International Agency for Cancer Research (IARC) recently classified as a 'probably human carcinogen'. The lion's share of the GM traits used in South African maize production belong to Monsanto.

Spot checking of labelling

While spot checks conducted by the ACB of the labels on foodstuffs containing GM content on supermarket shelves indicate a slight improvement regarding the disclosure of GM content, inconsistencies and inaccuracies remain rife. Frequently these labels leave consumers in the dark. Most Pioneer food products carry labels stating 'Produced using Genetic Modification' or 'Genetically Modified', but its Bokomo Pronutro Toddlers Apple and Banana is not labelled even though the GM

levels of its maize and soya content are well above 5%. Both Nestle and Kellogg's remain adamant about not providing any information to consumers with regard to the GM status of their products, which is in line with their support for the anti-labelling lobby in the USA. Tiger Brands is still using the dubious and misleading phrase, 'May Contain Genetically Modified Ingredients', despite the high levels of GM maize being detected in its maize meal.

South Africans say no to GMOs

South Africans nationwide recently came together to protest Monsanto's aggressive efforts to force GM foods on the country's consumers and farmers, by joining the global day of protests against Monsanto. Mariam Mayet, Director of ACB, is adamant that, "South Africans will continue to take on producers and the government until our broken food system is transformed into a socially just and ecologically sustainable food and farming system." The ACB calls on South African consumers to continue to demand GM-free options on all our food products—processed and staples—and to insist on an open and transparent process to re-open at the labelling debate.

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Please see tables below.

Table 1: Consolidated Test Results 2008-2015 of levels of GM maize in maize meal products found on South African supermarket shelves

Product	Company	GM content (% of ingredient)	Year tested	Tested by	GM claim at the time of testing	Comments
Maize						
Iwisa Maize Meal	Premier	27.2% GM maize	2008	SafeAge	Unlabelled at the time	
Iwisa Super Maize Meal	Premier	81% GM maize	2013	ACB	Contains Genetically Modified Organisms	
Iwisa Maize Meal	Premier	91% GM maize	2015	ACB	Contains Genetically Modified Organisms	10 percentage points increase from 2013 level. The labelling is inaccurate.
Impala Maize Meal	Premier	66% GM maize	2012	ACB	Unlabelled at the time	Currently using the label 'Contains Genetically Modified Organisms'
Premier Course Braai Pap	Premier	55% GM maize	2013	ACB	Contains Genetically Modified Organisms	
Nyala Super Maize Meal	Premier	87% GM maize	2013	ACB	Contains Genetically Modified Organisms	
White Star Maize Meal	Pioneer	72% GM maize	2013	ACB	Maize is produced using genetic modification	
White Star Maize Meal	Pioneer	48% GM maize	2014	ACB	Maize is produced using genetic modification	24 percentage points drop from the 2013 level

White Star Maize Meal	Pioneer	55% GM maize	2015	ACB	Maize is produced using genetic modification	17 percentage points drop from the 2013 level
Ace Super Maize Meal	Tiger Brands	78% GM maize	2013	ACB	May Contain Genetically Modified Ingredients	This is a misleading label
Ace Super Maize Meal	Tiger Brands	87% GM maize	2015	ACB	May Contain Genetically Modified Ingredients	9 percentage points increase over the 2013 level. The label is misleading
Ace Maize Rice	Tiger Brands	70% GM maize	2013	ACB	May Contain Genetically Modified Ingredients	This is a misleading label
Ace Instant Porridge	Tiger Brands	68% GM maize	2013	ACB	May Contain Genetically Modified Ingredients	This is a misleading label
Ace Samp	Tiger Brands	54%	2008	SafeAge	May Contain Genetically Modified Ingredients	This is a misleading label
Tafelberg	Foodcorp	61% GM maize	2014	ACB	May Contain Genetically Modified Ingredients	This is a misleading label
Tafelberg Maize Meal	Foodcorp	88% GM maize	2015	ACB	May Contain Genetically Modified Ingredients	27 percentage points increase over the 2014 level. The label is misleading

Woolworths Super Maize Meal	Woolworths	79% GM maize	2013	ACB	May Be Genetically Modified	This is a misleading label
Lion Samp and Beans	Progress Milling	48% GM maize	2013	ACB	May Contain Genetically Modified Ingredients	This is a misleading label

Table 2: Consolidated Test Results 2008-2015 of levels of GM maize and GM soya in baby cereals and processed cereals found on South African supermarket shelves

Product	Company	GM content (% of ingredient)	Year of test	Tested by	GM claim at time of testing	Comments
Pronutro	Pioneer	52.70%	2008	SafeAge	None	
Pronutro Wheat free	Pioneer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 90% GM maize, • 71% GM soya 	2012	ACB	Unlabelled at the time	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3.18% GM maize, • GM soya not detected 	2015	ACB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unlabelled in English; - Maize and soya are labelled genetically modified in French and Spanish 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 87 percentage point drop in GM maize and a 71% drop in GM soya from 2012 levels. - This level would not trigger labelling as per current regulations, which shows a shortcoming in the 5% threshold
Pronutro Toddlers Apple and	Pioneer	97.50%	2008	SafeAge	None	

Bananas		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 18.17% GM maize • 15.06% GM soya 	2015	ACB	No label	There is a 70 percentage point drop in the GM maize from the 2008 level. The maize and soya should be labelled as Genetically Modified.
Futurelife	Futurelife	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 100% GM maize • 37% GM soya 	2012	ACB	Unlabelled at the time.	<p>Futurelife conceded to consumer demands and is sourcing non-GM maize and soya. Currently labelling as Non-GMO.</p> <p>Pioneer Foods has entered into an agreement to acquire a 50% shareholding</p>
Bokomo Oatees	Pioneer	45.62% GM maize	2015	ACB	Genetically Modified	
Jungle Breakfast	Tiger Brands	41% GM maize	2013	ACB	May Contain Genetically Modified Ingredients	Tiger Brands insists on using this misleading label
Jungle Ultra Energy	Tiger Brands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 57.39 % GM maize • GM soya detected below LOQ 	2015	ACB	Genetically Modified Ingredient	

Purity Baby First	Tiger Brands	71% GM maize	2013	ACB	May Contain Genetical ly Modified Ingredi nts	This is a misleading label
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Purity Cream of Maize	Tiger Brands	24.9% GM maize	2008	SafeAge	Unlabelled at the time	
		56% GM maize	2013	ACB	Unlabelled at the time	Currently labelled as GMO free in line with Tiger Brands bowing to consumer pressure and committing to sourcing non-GM maize for its baby cereals only.
Purity Nutripak	Tiger Brands	Detected —below LOQ	2015	ACB	No claim	
Nestle Cerelac Infant Cereal	Nestle	76% GM maize	2012	ACB	No label	
Nestle Cerelac Maize	Nestle	0.45% GM maize	2015	ACB	No claim	
Nestle Milo Cereal	Nestle	Detected —below LOQ	2015	ACB	No claim	
Nestle Cheerios	Nestle	0.52% GM maize	2015	ACB	No claim	
Corn Flakes						
Kellogg's Corn Flakes Porridge	Kelloggs	1.56% GM maize	2015	ACB	No claim	
Kellogg's Corn Flakes	Kelloggs	GM-free	2008	SafeAge	No claim	
Kellogg's Corn Flakes	Kelloggs	Detected —but not quantifiable	2015	ACB	No claim	
Bokomo Corn Flakes	Pioneer	Detected — but not quantifiable	2015	ACB	Genetically Modified	

Pick n Pay Corn Flakes	Pick n Pay	GM-free	2008	SafeAge	No claim	
Pick n Pay Corn Flakes	Pick n Pay	Not detected	2015	ACB	Maize Produced Using Genetic Modification	
Heartlands Corn Flakes	Heartlands	Not detected	2015	ACB	No claim	
Spar Corn Flakes	Spar	Not detected	2015	ACB	No claim	
Woolworths Corn Flakes	Woolworths	Not detected	2015	ACB	No claim	
Checkers Corn Flakes	Checkers	Not detected	2015	ACB	No claim	

* LOQ - Level of quantification

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