

## 75% Support NZ Remaining a GM Free Food Producer

*Media Statement – 16 August 2005*

Three quarters of New Zealanders would support the nation's food production remaining GM Free.

A poll conducted this month for the Sustainability Council by DigiPoll resulted in 74.5% supporting New Zealand's food production remaining GM Free, once informed there is no commercial production of GM food in this country. This compares to 70.1% support when the same question was put during the heat of the moratorium debate two years ago.

Polling has also shown a lack of public confidence in the regulation of GMOs. In particular, the work of ERMA - the Government agency responsible for assessing whether any GMO should be released into the environment. Those who did not have confidence in ERMA to regulate GMOs (45%) outnumbered those who did (40%). These results, from a poll conducted for ERMA in March, were obtained by the Sustainability Council under the Official Information Act.

The high level of support for New Zealand remaining a GM Free Food Producer is striking because the profile of the GM debate has not been as high in the last eighteen months as in 2003. Most notably, there have not been any applications to release a GMO since the moratorium was lifted.

Research into the outdoor use of GMOs has however been continuing apace with projects in New Zealand to develop GM varieties of: vegetables, grasses, milk products, and plants producing pharmaceuticals. Substantial investments are being made in these projects in the expectation that at some stage GM products will be allowed out of containment.

With these future decision points in mind, it is important that each political party makes clear its position on the outdoor use of GMOs. In particular, would it support New Zealand remaining a GM Free Food Producer during the term of the next Parliament?

Even if the public had full confidence in the regulatory framework, ERMA is only allowed to consider applications "case by case". Yet GM food production is a major national policy decision. For a country that earns half its export income from food, this is a fundamental branding and marketing call in addition to raising a host of other strategic issues. National policy decisions should not be delegated to ERMA, so political parties need to have policies that address the strategic question of whether New Zealand is to remain a GM Free Food Producer.

The Sustainability Council is pro-science and sees potential in the use of genetic modification in medicine. However the Council believes New Zealand should remain a GM Free Food Producer at least until there is clear acceptance of GM products in key export markets, and sufficient research has been undertaken on the environmental effects of GMOs to properly assess their impact in New Zealand.

## Poll Details

### GM Free Food Producer Poll

*Question:* “While genetic modification is being used in medicine and research, there is no commercial production of genetically modified food in this country. Should New Zealand's food production remain GM free?”

*Response:*

Aug 2003 (Colmar Brunton): Yes: 70.1%; No: 18.2%; Don't know: 11.7%.

Aug 2005 (DigiPoll): Yes: 74.5%; No: 18.3%; Don't know: 7.2%.

Both polls have a sample size of 500 and a margin of error of +/- 4.4%. (A breakdown of the 2005 result shows a very close match of urban and rural figures which can otherwise be a source of sampling uncertainty.)

### ERMA Confidence Poll

*Question:* “How confident are you in the ability of the Authority to regulate GMOs in New Zealand?”

*Response:*

Feb/Mar 2005 (BRC): Very confident 9%, Confident 31%	Total =40%
Not Particularly Confident 25%, Not at all Confident 20%	Total =45%
Don't know/refused	15%

The research was conducted for ERMA by BRC and the sample of 288 was drawn from the full sample of 1000 used for the omnibus survey that the question was a part of. Selection was made on the basis of respondents who “indicated they had knowledge of ERMA as an organisation”. A margin of error is not listed.