

## Leaving GM Contaminated Crops in the Ground Goes Against Market Realities

*Media Statement – 20 October 2004*

The recommendation by a Parliamentary select committee that GM contaminated crops be allowed to remain in the ground goes against market realities. Exporters cannot sell contaminated products to buyers that have no tolerance for GM, and the market for corn products exported from New Zealand is overwhelmingly zero tolerant.

The select committee has recognised the need for zero tolerance to be maintained at the border and the same commercial pressures that make this good policy apply just the same once seeds are planted. One Kiwi exporter has already lost \$500,000 from contamination in a corn product and was told point blank that “it’s either contaminated or it’s not”.

Corn varieties make up 95% of the area planted in seeds tested by MAF for GM content. So by MAF’s assessment, this is a corn seed issue (sweetcorn and maize) and that picture is unlikely to change in the next few years.

Sweetcorn is grown in New Zealand primarily for export and the main buyers for this, in Japan and Australia, will not accept any level of GM content. A significant proportion of maize producers must also ultimately meet zero tolerance standards set by the markets they deliver to.

Leading New Zealand food producers believe that any GM contamination “real or perceived” anywhere in New Zealand is potentially damaging for market access, such is the level of customer sensitivity.

This ultimately places pressure on farmers and the Chairman of Federated Farmers maize growers committee, Colin McKinnon, has clearly expressed the concern that the market for maize for grain in New Zealand demands that product be free of GM content. “Penfords are adamant that if there is any contamination whatsoever, they will stop buying from us. If the growers lost Penfords as a buyer, the maize industry would collapse. You can't lose 30% of your sales” Mr McKinnon told *Straight Furrow*.

If any changes are to be made to the current regime, the place to focus first is at the border. This is the easiest place to address the problem and current standards can be significantly improved. The Sustainability Council’s recent research report, *Seeding Purity*, extensively documents a number of simple and inexpensive steps. These include requiring new quality assurance practices to be used, such as those developed by Pacific Seeds, in addition to significantly raising the quantities of seeds tested to improve detection.

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The Council’s report *Seeding Purity* is available at [www.sustainabilitynz.org](http://www.sustainabilitynz.org)