

Government Yet to Set Farmer GM Contamination Limits

Media Statement 17 September 2003

Government has yet to specify what levels of GM contamination will be officially tolerated beyond a GM farmer's boundary said Sustainability Council Executive Director Simon Terry.

The Royal Commission on Genetic Modification recommended that MAF develop codes of practice for GM crops to define the size of buffer zones, and thus expected contamination levels beyond the growing area. However, government has put off this work. Environment Minister Marian Hobbs said yesterday it will wait and see what GM crops come forward.

The purpose of setting out codes of practice in advance is to work out exactly how non-GM farmers are to be protected. Given that no systems for preventing contamination of non-GM crops have been demonstrated, this means setting officially tolerated contamination levels - or else declaring that coexistence is not viable.

MAF told the Royal Commission that "If standards demand zero tolerance for accidental GM contamination, then coexistence may not be possible." That is exactly the standard that non-GM producers such as Gisborne based Sunrise Coast must meet for its markets. Research for the European Commission flatly states that segregation system may not even be able to keep contamination below a 1% level, and would be costly.

Government's unwillingness to set out the codes of practice leaves a trail of unanswered questions:

- What will be the officially tolerated contamination levels beyond the farm boundary, or is coexistence not viable for certain crops?
- Who pays for the cost of putting segregation measures in place and how will these address supply chain contamination risks such as harvesting, transport and processing?
- Who pays if GM contamination causes losses for non-GM producers?

New Zealand food producers are entitled to answers to these questions before the planned expiry of the moratorium in just six weeks time.

Contact Details

Simon Terry, Executive Director, 04-913-3655, 025-444-678
www.sustainabilitynz.org