

## Strong Public Support for Zero Tolerance to GM Contamination

*Media Statement – 17 August 2005*

79% New Zealanders would support the current policy of zero tolerance to GM contamination of seed imports. Polling conducted for the Sustainability Council by DigiPoll also found 77% support for zero tolerance to GM contamination of crops in the field, once informed that this too is the current policy.

Public opinion is thus squarely in line with the needs of New Zealand exporters whose markets demand food free of GM content – however that contamination may arise. Though the current incident involved contamination of soy that was not grown in New Zealand, two points stand out from this experience.

The first is that this is a type of “supply chain” incident that is well documented overseas. While there are ways of minimising the chances of GM contamination occurring during transport and storage, the risk of such incidents was a key reason the Australian Wheat Board successfully opposed commercial production there of an entirely separate crop - GM canola.

This current incident shows how any decision to permit GM food production in New Zealand would open up new sources of risks extending far beyond the company growing a GMO. It would raise costs and marketing risks for a much wider set of food producers.

The second point is that New Zealand still has quite inadequate systems for border detection of GM contamination and the source of this incident could have been very different. MAF is admirably thorough in chasing down contamination once it is shown to be present. However, there has been very limited reform of border detection systems since the breach last year and the review this triggered.

MAF’s current test for imported seed uses such a small sample size that around 5% of the time, the single test required will not show up GMOs at concentrations of 0.1% or less. New Zealand food producers that are serious about detecting GM content use between two and fifteen times the sample size MAF requires. Trebling the number of seeds used would reduce from 5% to 1% the chances of the border test missing GM contamination at a level of 0.1%.

Other low cost priorities for reform include:

- **Designing model quality assurance procedures** – that importers can use to track all stages of seed breeding and transport.
- **Improving incentives** - by ensuring the costs arising from contaminated seeds rest with the importing party in the first instance.

MAF can best protect vulnerable food producers and align with public opinion by making far better use of low cost border protection options.

## DigiPoll Survey Questions

*Question 1: "New Zealand currently does not allow any GM contamination to be present in imported seeds. Should New Zealand continue this zero tolerance policy?"*

*Response: Yes: 78.8%; No: 15.3%; Don't know: 5.9%.*

*Question 2: "New Zealand currently does not allow any GM contamination to be present in crops grown in the field. Should New Zealand also continue this zero tolerance policy?"*

*Response: Yes: 77.2%; No: 16.1%; Don't know: 6.7%.*

Both polls were conducted in early August 2005, have a sample size of 500 and a margin of error of +/- 4.4%.

## GM Free Food Producer Poll

Earlier this week, the Sustainability Council released a further poll registering that three quarters of New Zealanders (74.5%) would support the nation's food production remaining GM Free.

### Sample Size: The larger the sample, the better the detection

<i>Number of Seeds Tested</i>	<i>Confidence that test will detect a 0.1% level of GM contamination</i>	<i>Chance of failing to detect 0.1% contamination</i>
3,200	95%	1 in 20 tests
10,000	99%	1 in 100 tests