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**Genetically engineered Pigs and Potatoes: when will GE technology in food production finally be banned**

- Joan Russow - Global Compliance Research Project

Canwest media has reported: "Genetically engineered pigs are one step closer to becoming meat on Canadian kitchen tables with the federal government poised to declare that they do not harm the environment. Canwest News Service has learned Environment Canada has determined that Yorkshire pigs developed at the University of Guelph are not toxic to the environment under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act. The official declaration will be made on Saturday."

And also it has been reported that BASF's genetically modified Amflora potato, which contains genes that are resistant to antibiotics has just been approved by the European Commission,

*A version of this Call for Banning of GE food and crops was first circulated in 1997, then distributed interationally at conferences and at the UN. Too often opponents of Genetic engineering call for only labeling as though it is nothing more than a right to choose issue; labeling does not address the equity issue, health issue and the environment issue.*

**Enforce the Precautionary principle: genetically engineered foods, including the Terminator gene, should be banned** PEJnews- Joan Russow (PhD) Global Compliance Research Project

To be consistent with the precautionary principle, the Campaign for the Banning of the Terminator Gene must include the banning of all genetically engineered food and crops. The precautionary principle is a principle of international common law and as such must be incorporated into the statutory provisions of each state.

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Canada should not be mimicking the US in its disregard for the precautionary principle. In 2002 the night-long debate on the precautionary principle at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), Canada was obsequiously following the US in the gutting of the applicability of the precautionary principle. The precautionary principle, as a principle of international customary law, must override all statutory law, and not be subsumed as one component of risk assessment. The precautionary principle has been formulated internationally through the years, from its preliminary form at the Conference on Humans and the Environment

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in Stockholm (UNCHE) in 1972, to its reformulation at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio in 1992. At UNCED, the precautionary principle was adopted in the Rio Declaration, and the precautionary principle was an integral part of the Convention on Biological Diversity and of the Framework Convention on Climate Change.

The precautionary principle has contained the following elements: where there is a threat of environmental degradation, (of loss of biodiversity, of climate change, of harm to human health), lack of full scientific certainty shall (or should) not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent the threat.

If the precautionary principle had been applied, all forms of genetically engineered foods and crops would never have been tested, approved, and released. At least since 1997, there has been sufficient scientific evidence to justify evoking the precautionary principle and calling for an immediate ban of all genetically engineered food and crops.

Unfortunately, the Canadian Federal government, especially the Health Protection Branch and the Food Inspection Branch, have been negligent in permitting (i) the trials of genetically engineered crops since 1988, (ii) the sale of genetically engineered seeds, genetically engineered foods such as tomatoes, corn, potatoes, squash, canola and soy since 1994, (iii) the approval and release in 1996.

Unfortunately, consumer groups have treated the issue of genetically engineered foods and crops as solely a right to choose issue, and have lobbied internationally through the International Consumers Association and National Consumers Association for nothing more than the labeling of genetically engineered foods and crops.

Labeling does not address the equity and the environmental issues and it does not communicate the urgency of the issue. It is all very well for those who can afford to buy organic food to affirm the right to know, but not everyone can afford to buy organic food. Also, with genetic drift, it is possible that a wide range of organic crops could be contaminated with genetically engineered produce.

What is more surprising is how Canadian environmental and other activists groups have been so cautious about calling for the outright banning of genetically engineered foods and crops. When all the activists groups were united in calling for the banning of rBST, and for the banning of GE wheat, both rBST and GE wheat were banned. Many groups have been reluctant to call for a complete ban because so many farmers in Canada and elsewhere had already planted GE crops. Perhaps it was because of the concern for the farmers already involved with planting GE crops, or it was because of a flawed interpretation of free trade agreements, that there was this reluctance.

As a result of these groups being willing to just call for labeling and not banning, there still remain other genetically engineered crops permeating the market. If only, in Canada when these groups were part of the consultation process in 1993, they had raised the red flag across Canada, and called for banning, Canadians would have been a GE-free state.

At international conferences such as the Biodevastation I Conference in St. Louis in July 1998, and Biodevastation II in Delhi, March 1999, representatives of environmental organizations, health groups, scientists and activists met to discuss actions against genetically engineered

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foods and crops. At both these international conferences I worked with others on a Declaration and a Resolution calling for the banning of genetically engineered foods and crops. The Declaration was endorsed in the plenary in principle at the Biodevastation I conference (See annex), and the following Resolution was signed by all but two participants at the Biodevastation II Conference.

## **BIODEVASTATION II GLOBAL RESOLUTION CALLING FOR BANNING OF GENETICALLY ENGINEERED FOODS AND CROPS:**

- (i) A global ban on genetically engineered foods and crops;
- (ii) A global ban on the patenting of life forms;
- (iii) An end to the exploitation of the knowledge of farmers, peasants and indigenous peoples;
- (iv) A global support program for promoting organic agriculture and other forms of ecological farming, and institute a fair and just transition program for affected farmers and communities.

We are living in a wake of corporate/government/university/ negligence from previous harmful substances that were once deemed safe for human health and the environment. Given the unattended consequences of genetically engineered foods and crops, and the global commitment to the precautionary principle, it becomes imperative to institute a complete ban on genetically engineered foods and crops. There is sufficient emerging scientific evidence to justify the banning and the immediate removal of the GE food off the grocery shelves and a global ban to prohibit all further export of genetically engineered foods and crops.

## **ANNEX: ST. LOUIS BIODEVASTATION DECLARATION:**

From the July 17 -19, 1998, International Biodevastation I Conference, St. Louis, USA.

Proposed by Joan Russow, (Global Compliance Research Project), approved in principle in the plenary.

Updated with input from Dr Mae-Wan Ho at the Biodevastation II Conference held in Delhi, March 9/10, 1999:

**TO BAN GENETICALLY ENGINEERED FOODS AND CROPS, THE HUMAN GENOME DIVERSITY PROJECT, TERMINATOR GENE AND EXPLOITATION OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES FOR PRIVATE PROFIT;  
TO INSTITUTE A FAIR AND JUST TRANSITION PROGRAM FOR AFFECTED FARMERS AND COMMUNITIES:**

**MINDFUL THAT THE PRECAUTIONARY PRINCIPLE** affirms that where there is a threat to human health or to the environment, the lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent the threat. The precautionary principle has long been a tenet of international customary law and, as such, is required to be integrated into state law.

**THE REVERSE ONUS PRINCIPLE** means that where there is a reasonable apprehension that a process or product may pose a significant threat to human health or to the environment, the onus of proof is on the proponent to establish that the product or process is safe, and serves demonstrable public needs, rather than on the opponents to demonstrate harm. Many nations

have also undertaken to adhere to this principle.

**THE PREVENTION OF DISASTERS PRINCIPLE** affirms that extreme care should be taken to prevent consequences that are likely to be unexpected, possibly long-term, and thus difficult to determine through tests. At recent international conferences, the member states of the United Nations have committed themselves to observe the Prevention of Disasters Principle, including both natural and human-caused (anthropogenic) disasters.

**THE PREVENTION OF TRANSFER TO OTHER STATES OF HARMFUL SUBSTANCES** ensures that substances and activities that are harmful to human health or that cause environmental destruction will not be transferred to other states.

**THE PREVENTION OF ACTIVITIES THAT ARE CULTURALLY INAPPROPRIATE PRINCIPLE** ensures that nothing shall be done on the lands of indigenous peoples that would cause environmental harm or be culturally inappropriate.

**THE INTERGENERATIONAL EQUITY PRINCIPLE** ensures the rights of future generations and the right of a child to a safe environment.

**THE NUREMBERG PRINCIPLE** holds that citizens are morally obliged to act to oppose unjust laws and unjust state actions.

These principles have been endorsed by the member states of the United Nations. Many governments have disregarded these principles in giving uncritical support to corporations engaged in genetic experimentation and in promoting genetic engineering in agribusiness applications.

**AFFIRMING THAT:** The introduction of genetically modified substances is an irresponsible experiment being conducted on the entire planet, with little or no research into its effects on the environment or human health. Genetically modified organisms are by definition new life forms which, if released into the natural environment, may well have unanticipated synergistic interactions with an unlimited range of existing organisms. The introduced genes have the potential to spread out of control, both by cross-pollination to related species and horizontal transfer to unrelated species. For instance, pollen from crops carrying the terminator gene - the gene that renders the seed from a crop infertile - may disperse and infect crops in other fields, also rendering them infertile. There are also well-founded concerns about the unintended effects of introducing foreign genetic material into organisms which are ingested by humans, which may include toxins and allergens.

The introduction of new organisms has potential ramifications which are complex, long-term and unpredictable. The prevention of anthropogenic disasters must surely include avoiding the introduction of new procedures and substances with such far-reaching ramifications, especially where neither the benefits nor the needs for them are yet proven. These complex ramifications may be difficult or impossible to assess with sufficient certainty to justify production.

**NOTING THAT:** there is new evidence of hazards: herbicide-resistant transgenes have spread

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to wild relatives by cross-pollination in both oilseed rape and sugar beet (Brookes, 1999), creating many species of potential superweeds. One study shows that transgenes may be up to 30 times more likely to escape than the plant's own genes, (Bergelson, J, Purrington, B and Wichmann, G, 1998). Bt-toxins engineered into a wide range of transgenic plants already released into the environment may build up in the soil and have devastating impacts on pollinators and other beneficial insects (Crecchi, C and Stotzky, G, 1998).

Serious doubts over the safety of transgenic foods are raised by new revelations on the results of animal feeding experiments. Potatoes engineered with snowdrop lectin fed to rats caused highly significant reduction in width of many organs, impairment of immunological responsiveness and signs suggestive of viral infection, (Leake, C. and Fraser, L (1999).

Research from the Netherlands show that antibiotic-resistant marker genes from genetically engineered bacteria at a substantial frequency of  $10^{-7}$  in an artificial gut, (MacKenzie, D. 1999).

There is sufficient concern about genetically engineered foods and sufficient anticipatory scientific concern about the possible interaction of genetically engineered crops with existing organisms to justify the banning of genetically modified foods and crops. It is possible that no test could be devised that would be comprehensive enough to demonstrate the safety of introducing genetically modified organisms, because of the complexities which can arise from their interaction with existing organisms.

**CONCERNED THAT:** Government representatives at the recent meeting of the Codex Alimentarius in Ottawa ignored citizens' calls for urgent action to label existing genetically engineered foods, and to extend the Codex Alimentarius' terms of reference to include a call for banning genetically engineered foods. The representatives of the Codex Alimentarius had the unique opportunity to finally demonstrate that the global community is prepared to prevent future generations from being exposed to the effects of present negligence. In addition, the Global Community failed to negotiate a Biosafety Protocol.

**WE ARE FURTHER CONCERNED THAT:** universities have entered into substantive contracts with agribusiness companies involved with genetically engineered foods, and that many agribusiness companies have been exploiting indigenous peoples' knowledge of esoteric organisms and their medicinal effects.

**AND WE REJECT :** The myth perpetuated by Monsanto and the Biotechnology industry that the world cannot be fed without genetic engineering, and that small farmers do not feed the world; **WHILE** a considerable percentage of the world's known biodiversity is located in developing countries, any effective mechanism for the protection of and reward for the local custodians of these genetic resources is being stalled by northern, industrialized nations.

**THEREFORE, WE CALL UPON:**

The United Nations to call upon member states of the United Nations:

- (a) to act immediately to call for the implementation of existing International declarations, conventions, covenants, treaties on human rights and the environment to support the cancellation of the human genome diversity project, the patenting of seeds, and all further commercial exploitation of indigenous peoples and of the knowledge of indigenous peoples;
- (b) to prevent, under the Convention on Biological Diversity (i) the transfer of all genetically modified organisms, and (ii) the development of pesticide resistant crops;

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(c) to immediately halt the harvesting of genetic material of indigenous peoples and to demand that these efforts be replaced with international dedication to preserving the existence of indigenous peoples and their culture;

(d) to prevent "bioprospecting" - exploiting and patenting the knowledge of indigenous peoples;

(e) to not defeat the purpose of the Convention on Biological Diversity by failing to invoke the precautionary principle to justify the banning of the production of genetically engineered foods and crops;

(f) to recognize that conservation of Biodiversity is antithetical to the development and altering through genetic engineering;

(g) to prevent, under the Convention on Biological Diversity, the transfer of all genetically modified organisms;

(h) to call for an immediate moratorium on research, development, release, and movement of genetically engineered foods and crops, including those modified for producing industrial chemical and pharmaceutical products.

### XENOTRANPLANTATION RESEARCH AND EXPLOITATION, HUMAN EMBRYO RESEARCH AND EXPLOITATION AND HUMAN CLONING:

\* to prevent under the Convention on Biological Diversity the development of pesticide-resistant crops;

\* to ban genetically engineered foods and immediately remove all genetically engineered foods from the food distribution system;

\* to institute an immediate ban on genetically engineered Bovine Growth Hormone, and endorse the campaign to rid rBGH from school milk (passed in plenary);

\* to keep forests, farms and food safe, and to oppose the genetic engineering of all plants and animals (passed in plenary);

\* to abolish patents of genetic sequences and living organisms in the form of "intellectual property rights" (passed in plenary);

\* to stop the National Violence Initiative Project (U.S.), and to immediately halt the drugging of black and latino children in the name of their supposed "genetic predisposition" to committing crimes because neither behaviour nor intelligence is racially or genetically determined (passed in plenary);

\* to disband the Human Genome Diversity Project and end the colonization of the genes of indigenous people (passed in plenary);

\* to immediately cease the administration of experimental and genetically engineered drugs to prisoners, people living on American Indian reservations, and people in so-called "third world" countries (passed in plenary);

\* to ban "terminator" seed technology and patents, and to immediately cease all "terminator" tests and ban its application (passed in plenary);

\* to encourage smaller-scaled organic farming, local food systems, home-scale gardening, and ecosystem restoration, and to oppose the consolidation of corporate and monocrop farming and their reliance on genetic engineering and toxic herbicides and insecticides (passed in plenary);

\* to urge the Grameen bank to discontinue all further "partnerships" with Monsanto and its affiliated corporations;

\* to discontinue all financial support for agribusiness, and to financially support and promote organic agriculture;

\* to ensure that the designation of "organic" does not include genetically engineered food,

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irradiated food or related practices;

\* to prevent the transfer to other states, particularly developing states, of substances and activities that cause environmental degradation or that are harmful to human health, and to recognize that compliance with this principle from the Rio Declaration would entail the prevention of transfer of genetically modified organisms;

\* to implement the 1986 UN resolution to ensure that the use of scientific technology is in peace and for the benefit of humanity;

\* to guarantee the farmers the right to produce seeds and to recognize this as a human right in fulfilling the guaranteed right to food;

\* to call upon states to implement the right of citizens to organically grown, affordable, accessible food;

\* to ensure that citizens are fed clean, nutritional, organically grown food before food is authorized for export;

\* to condemn the conversion of sensitive ecosystems for ranches and cattle production;

\* to condemn the round table approach to decision-making that compromises ethics, that fosters and condones conflict of interest, undermines principle and leads to the lowest common denominator;

\* to act on the commitment made in 1972 to eliminate the production of weapons of mass destruction;

\* to endorse October 15 as the eve of World Food Day as the Global Days of Action against genetically engineered food, and subsequent Global Days of Action against genetically engineered foods and crops.