

No scientific consensus on safety of genetically modified organisms

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There is no scientific consensus on the safety of genetically modified foods and crops, according to a statement released today by an international group of more than 90 scientists, academics and physicians.

The statement comes in response to recent claims from the GM industry and some scientists, journalists, and commentators that there is a "scientific consensus" that GM foods and crops were generally found safe for human and animal health and the environment. The statement calls these claims "misleading", adding, "This claimed consensus on GMO safety does not exist."

"Such claims may place human and environmental health at undue risk and create an atmosphere of complacency," states Dr. Angelika Hilbeck, chairperson of the European Network of Scientists for Social and Environmental Responsibility (ENSSER) and one of the signatories.

"The statement draws attention to the diversity of opinion over GMOs in the scientific community and the often contradictory or inconclusive findings of studies on GMO safety. These include toxic effects on laboratory animals fed GM foods, increased pesticide use from GM crop cultivation, and the unexpected impacts of Bt insecticidal crops on beneficial and non-target organisms," Dr Hilbeck continues.

In spite of this nuanced and complex picture, a group of like-minded people makes sweeping claims that GM crops and foods are safe. In reality, many unanswered questions remain and in some cases there is serious cause for concern.

Prof C. Vyvyan Howard, a medically qualified toxicopathologist based at the University of Ulster and a signatory to the statement, said: "A substantial number of studies suggest that GM crops and foods can be toxic or allergenic. It is often claimed that millions of Americans eat GM foods with no ill effects. But as the US has no GMO labeling and no epidemiological studies have been carried out, there is no way of knowing whether the rising rates of chronic diseases seen in that country have anything to do with GM food consumption or not. Therefore this claim has no scientific basis."

The signatories to the statement call for the compliance to the precautionary approach to GM crops and foods internationally agreed upon in the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and UN's Codex Alimentarius.

Commenting on the statement, one of the signatories, Prof Ernst-Ulrich von Weizsäcker, Co-Chair of the International Resource Panel (UNEP) and Co-President of The Club of Rome, said: "The future of food and agriculture is one of the great challenges of humankind of the 21st century. The claim of scientific consensus on GMO safety is misleading and misrepresents diverse and inconclusive scientific evidence. The full range of scientific research needs to be taken into account, in open, transparent and honest debates which involve the broader society, when decisions of global concern are being made. This is a responsibility of scientists and science."

Another signatory to the statement, Prof Brian Wynne, associate director and co-principal investigator from 2002-2012 of the UK ESRC Centre for the Economic and Social Aspects of Genomics, Cesagen, Lancaster University, said: "It is misleading and irresponsible for anyone to claim that there is a consensus on these important issues. Many salient questions remain open, while more are being discovered and reported by independent scientists in the international scientific literature. Indeed

answering of some key public interest questions based on such research have been left neglected for years by the huge imbalance in research funding, against thorough biosafety research and in favour of the commercial-scientific promotion of the technology."

This statement is released by ENSSER the week after the World Food Prize was awarded to employees of the GM seed giants Monsanto and Syngenta. This award has provoked outrage worldwide and stands in stark contrast to recent rulings in several countries restricting or banning the field release or commercialisation of certain GM crops. These include 9 countries in Europe and Mexico, but also developing countries like Bangladesh, Philippines, India where an indefinite moratorium on field release trials was recommended by the Technical Expert Committee of the Supreme Court unless certain conditions are met including proper safety testing. Furthermore, GMO approvals are under legal challenge in Argentina and Brazil due to questions over the scientific basis of approvals. Most if not all of them underline the lack of proof of safety and insufficient testing.

Signatories of the statement include prominent and respected scientists, including Dr Hans Herren, a former winner of the World Food Prize and this year's Alternative Nobel Prize laureate, and Dr Pushpa Bhargava, known as the father of modern biotechnology in India.

More information: On court ruling in Mexico:

www.foodfirst.org/en/GMO+corn+banned+in+Mexico

On court ruling in the Philippines: www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/..._ggplant-field-trials

On recommendations in India: www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/agri...s/article4658619.ece

On recommendations in Bangladesh:

www.gmwatch.org/index.php/news...elease-in-bangladesh

On recommendations in Argentina and Brazil:

www.gmwatch.org/index.php/news/archive/2013/15099

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