

# The True Food Campaign

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## The true food campaign

The True Food campaign is about one of our most basic needs and one of our greatest passions — the food we eat. The genetic engineering of our staple food crops means directly controlling people's lives — through altering our 'daily bread'. The True Food campaign aims to empower everyday people to take back control of their food.

### GE-free from paddock to plate

As individuals, we often feel powerless when faced with corporate influence on a global scale. But all companies are dependent on our choices as individuals — on whether or not we purchase their products. Whilst the multinational chemical companies producing GE crops might have influence over farmers and government, they remain powerless against consumer rejection. In short, if consumers don't want GE food, food companies won't use it and farmers won't grow it.

The further introduction of GE food is not inevitable. The first experimental GE potatoes and tomatoes have been withdrawn from the market, the commercialisation of wheat has been postponed due to a lack of consumer acceptance and food companies worldwide are declaring themselves GE-free. Internationally, consumers are voicing their rejection of GE foods and food companies are listening.

Europe is a great example of how successful this strategy can be. Companies like Nestle, who were advocating the use of GE food on German TV in 1996, have since vowed not to use any GE ingredients in their products because consumer rejection was so vocal.

### A GE-free future starts in your trolley

The daily decisions we make about which foods we eat, impact directly on whether genetically engineered crops continue to be grown. A GE-free future starts in your trolley! Demanding GE-free food can stop the GE industry at its roots. As profits decline, the biotech industry loses its only incentive. Food companies that have invested a lot in their brand, are far more sensitive to customer concern than governments. Politicians have several years before they have to worry about the voter's impact on elections, whereas the daily vote for a certain food product can mean the rise or fall of a company.

Farmers too need to know that GE is not the path of the future — that there is no market for GE food, because consumers don't want it. Research has shown that the more people know about GE foods, the less likely they are to buy them. In Australia, 68% of people would be less likely to buy a food they knew had been genetically engineered. As information on health and environmental concerns continues to emerge, the opposition to genetically engineered organisms continues to grow.

## The True Food Network

When the customer speaks, companies listen. All over the world, people from all walks of life are uniting to regain control of their food. In Australia, the Greenpeace True Food Network allows people to voice their rejection of GE food and to take steps toward creating a GE-free Australia. On joining the True Food Network at <http://www.greenpeace.org.au/truefood/join.html> members are welcomed into a community of Australians active against GE food. Connected by e-mail and the website, members share inspiring initiatives and join in national activities. The Network sends out monthly updates on food company changes, feedback from other Network members, suggested Network activities and opportunities to unite our voices as one. Join the Network with a friend and act together to stop GE foods.

## Contacting companies

The most effective way to let food companies know you want GE-free food is to contact them directly. Most food companies offer a toll-free phone number (check the back of food packets or go to the True Food website <http://www.greenpeace.org.au/truefood> for details of company contacts). Let the customer service officer know that you demand food that is guaranteed to be GE-free right throughout the food chain. In most cases, food companies use these calls to monitor consumer trends, preferences and as a quality control measure. Frequently, each call is logged into a system that generates reports for the management. These reports effect the decisions made by the company. Speaking with food companies about GE is easy. Companies will often have a standard reply that may be intended to deflect concern. Be prepared to ask detailed questions and to probe beneath the surface of what may sound like a watertight response. Some helpful questions to ask are:

- Does your company USE any genetically engineered ingredients in any of its foods?
- Does this mean that you only label those GE ingredients that need to be labelled? (ie: those ingredients that have detectable GE matter in them)
- Do you know the source of all of your ingredients?
- Are you using any ingredients that might be refined from GE foods (eg: GE derived starches, sugars, oils)?
- Do your products contain animal ingredients? If so, can you guarantee that those ingredients are sourced from animals fed on non-GE feed?
- Does your company have a policy to exclude all GE ingredients including those derived from animals fed on GE feed?
- Please implement a policy that reflects my desire to eat food that is completely free of GE and GE derived ingredients.

*We don't need to be scientists to know that we don't want to eat GE food!*

## The role of supermarkets

Supermarkets have particular power to generate a food chain that is GE-free. As major players in the food industry they have significant influence over food manufacturers and suppliers. They also often produce their own brand products, over which they have complete control. Getting supermarkets to go GE-free in their own brands means shifting their suppliers as well. Since their own brands normally cover a wide range of products, you can impact on a range of industries, from grains to dairy or poultry. Major retailers in Europe, like Tesco's and Carrefour, have committed to being GE-free throughout the entire food chain of their own brands. This includes the animal feed fed to the animals whose meat, milk and eggs etc products they use. Check out the Supermarket Activist Kit for hints and tools on how to tell your supermarket to go GE-free!

## Create a true food future

The True Food campaign can take many forms. Organising ring-ins to companies, celebrating True Food with friends and neighbours, getting your favourite restaurant, street, suburb to go GE-free — all this contributes to stopping the GE industry at its root and to creating a culture in which GE food has no place. Whether working together via the internet, or over the backfence with neighbours; whether in a metropolitan city or country town — let's work together to create a future that is **GE-free from paddock to plate!**

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## GE-free food services

Providing food services involves taking responsibility for both the quality and safety of the food on offer. Local councils and other community groups provide a range of food services. In the interest of the safety and wellbeing of both the local people and the environment, councils and community groups are encouraged to ensure the food they are sourcing for these services, is not derived from genetically engineered ingredients.

Food services provided by councils, unions and other community institutions can include:

- Senior citizen centres cafes or canteens;
- Meals on Wheels services to frail, elderly or disabled;
- Frozen Meal services to frail, elderly or disabled;
- Pre-school meals;
- Day Care centre meals;
- School canteens;
- Community Centre services;
- Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) and Vacation Care;
- Day care services to frail, elderly or disabled;
- University dining halls and cafes.

## How to go GE-free

### 1. Communicating with the food service provider

In establishing GE-free food services it is important to liaise with the management of the food service provider. Points to communicate could include:

- their responsibility as a service provider to the community, to exercise care and caution;
- that the frail, elderly and children are often not able to make choices about the food they are being served;
- that the safety of GE foods for human consumption has yet to be proven;
- that many people reject GE foods on ethical or religious grounds;
- that genetically engineered food crops pose a series of threats to our environment.

### 2. Overcoming obstacles

A local council or shire has the power to pass a resolution requiring that all food suppliers guarantee that foods supplied to the council are free of GE products. Generally, local councils have some discretion as to whether or not they enter a commercial arrangement and can require GE-free food as a condition when renewing contracts with their food service provider.

Remind your council that it is the responsibility of the food suppliers to ensure they meet council requirements.

Food suppliers then make this requirement to their suppliers and so on down the food chain to ensure that the food crop itself is not genetically engineered. Under new labelling regulations in Europe, this paper trail is now required from food manufacturers. Whilst here in Australia labelling is based on testing the end product for GE crop DNA.

### 3. GE-free throughout the food chain

As current Australian labelling requirements of GE foods contain numerous loopholes, it is crucial that local councils or community groups specify that they demand food that is not made using GE-derived ingredients *anywhere in the food chain*. This entails:

- No raw GE ingredients in food products (eg: corn flour);
- No refined GE ingredients (eg: oils, starches and sugars);
- No animal products from animals fed on GE feed.

These specifics are vitally important as food companies are otherwise able to issue statements such as: "XYZ food product does not *contain* any GE material". This statement does not indicate whether or not the company is *using* GE anywhere in its food chain. Such statements would, for example, still allow ingredients that are made from refined GE or from animals fed on GE feed. Refined ingredients and animal feed are the major uses for GE crops and must thus be confronted, in order to stop the release of GE organisms.

In Australia, the True Food Guide (produced by Greenpeace and GeneEthics Network) has rated food manufacturers according to their policy on GE. This guide can be used as a tool for food providers, to ensure the GE-free status of their food. The online version of the True Food Guide is available at <http://www.greenpeace.org.au/truefood>

There are already many local councils and tuck shops around Australia which have declared themselves GE-free.

## Sample local council motion

The following is a motion passed by the Hawkesbury Council.

HAWKESBURY Council resolves to:

4. A) Write to all suppliers of foodstuffs used at Council facilities seeking assurances that no products containing GE crops or GM ingredients are used in their production. Where the manufacturer or provider is unable or unwilling to give such assurances, Council discontinue the use of any foodstuffs or food services from that source.
  
- B) Require that all new contracts for the provision of food to council services and functions to specify that all produce supplied shall be GE free.

## GE animal feed

### Animal feed major use of GE crops

The main genetically engineered crops soy, corn, canola and cotton are not only eaten by humans but are widely fed to animals. It is estimated that around 60% of genetically engineered crops are used as animal feed.

### A threat to our environment

Genetic engineering (GE) is one of the most serious threats facing the environment this century, as we have little knowledge of what the future consequences of this technology might be. As living organisms, genetically engineered crops are uncontrollable and potentially devastating. Once in the environment, they cannot be recalled. (See briefings: "Genetic Pollution – a multiplying nightmare"; "GE Canola – out of control in Canada")

### Effects on animals and humans?

The health effects GE feed has on the animals forced to eat it are unknown - and so are the possible health effects on humans who consume these animal products. Few studies have been done into the impacts of GE feed on farm animals. In some cases, where these studies have been conducted, the results show poor scientific design and suspicious results indicating massive disruption of normal bodily functions<sup>1</sup>. In other cases, it has been the farmers themselves who have identified animal health problems after using GE feed<sup>2</sup>.

There is evidence to suggest that genes can be transferred from food into gut bacteria. This is particularly a concern with the possible transferral of antibiotic resistant genes. (See: Antibiotic Resistance in Genetically Engineered Plants; GE Food Safe to Eat?).

Genetically engineered crops that have been identified as potentially allergenic such as "Starlink" (a GE corn variety) are still being fed to animals when the health effects of the crops remain unexamined<sup>3</sup>. This same "Starlink" corn contaminated the human food supply in America, resulting in millions of dollars of corn products being recalled from supermarket shelves. This is just one example demonstrating how easily GE crops can contaminate the environment AND food supplies without warning.

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<sup>1</sup> Bad Science, Bad Decision, The evidence against Aventis' GM maize. Friends of the Earth, March 2001

<sup>2</sup> Seeds of Doubt, North American farmers' experience of GM crops. Soil Association, September 2002

<sup>3</sup> The market moves to non-GM animal feed. Greenpeace, October 2001

## Consumer rejection and lack of labelling

A Taylor Nelson Sofres poll conducted in April 2002 found that 61% of people in Australia would be less likely to buy a product if they knew it contained ingredients such as eggs, milk, or meat from an animal raised on a diet of genetically engineered feed.

Many people are opposed to GE on environmental, ethical or religious grounds. These people should have the right to not eat foods that have genetically engineered organisms in the food chain. Under current Australian labelling regulations ingredients derived from animals fed on GE crops, don't have to be labelled. Up to half of an average chicken's diet is thought to be genetically engineered. However, when buying the eggs or meat from that chicken, there is no way of knowing this. This emphasises the need for food producers to make the commitment not to use genetically engineered animal feed anywhere in the food chain of their products.

## Availability of non-GE animal feed

- *Meat and Dairy*

Australia has an advantage over many other countries with reference to GE in animal feed since the majority of animals used for dairy or meat production are exclusively fed upon grass or with Australian produced grains which are currently GE-free. Although GE cotton is sometimes used as an animal feed of last resort, the red meat and dairy industries have indicated that they can provide assurances that animals are non-GE fed and that indeed in many cases they already provide this paperwork for export market customers, eg in Japan & Europe.

- *Poultry*

The only other apparent area of concern for the use of GE crops in animal feed is the use of GE soy in poultry feed. Australia doesn't grow enough non-GE soy to meet the entire domestic market demand and so an estimated 500,000 tonnes are imported each year, mainly from the US. This soy is highly likely to be genetically engineered and is therefore an issue of concern for Greenpeace. However, non-GE soy is available upon request on the world market, especially from Brazil. . In addition, the main soy importers to Australia are already on record as supplying bulk volumes of non-GE soy into New Zealand and into a number of European and Asian countries.

## Retailers going GE-free in animal feed

Major retailers worldwide have taken the step to remove genetically engineered ingredients out of their entire food supply chain by also removing GE crops from their feed for poultry, pork, cattle and farmed fish products.

Those companies include the biggest European retailers Carrefour and Tesco, #1 Swiss retailer Migros, #2 British retailer ASDA, #1 retailer in Ireland Superquinn and many others. Customer demand has also led many big poultry companies not to use any GE in their chickenfeed, such as KFC suppliers Tegel's in New Zealand, Nutreco in Holland and Wiesenhof in Germany..

A number of large food companies operating in Australia have also removed GE animal feed from their supply chain, including Unilever, Heinz Watties, Arnotts Campbells, National Foods and Murray Goulburn.