

LEGCO PANEL ON HEALTH SERVICES

Progress Report on Study on Establishing a Labelling System for Genetically Modified Food

BACKGROUND

In the motion debate concerning the labelling of genetically modified (GM) food on 5 January 2000, the Secretary for the Environment and Food (SEF) indicated that the Government would strengthen public education on GM food as well as study the feasibility of setting up a GM food labelling system in Hong Kong. In March 2000, the Government submitted to the LegCo an interim report on its progress.

2. This paper reports on the follow up action taken by Government and the progress made since then. An outline of our work plan is also given.

PROGRESS TO DATE

Public Education

3. To provide the community with comprehensive and accurate information on GM food, we have undertaken the following public education programmes which include: -

Internet

A special chapter on GM food has been created at the website of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) (site address: <http://info.gov.hk/fehd/safefood/gmf/index1c.html>). It provides information on GM technology, safety of GM food, environmental and other concerns over GM food, international practices in labelling of GM food, etc. The content of the homepage is regularly updated to capture the latest developments. A Public Opinion Box is included in the homepage to invite and collect people's opinion regarding GM food and the Government's public education efforts.

Information Hotline

The same information on GM food has been recorded on the FEHD's 24-hour information hotline (telephone number: 28680000).

Information Leaflets

Two sets of information leaflets have been prepared and widely distributed through Home Affairs Department (HAD) and FEHD district offices, major public estates, public libraries and supermarkets. The first set gives a general introduction on GM Food, including the biotechnological process used in genetic modification, the background leading to the development of GM food, and the characteristics of commonly available GM food. The second set focuses on safety of GM food and the labelling approaches adopted by various countries. (Copies of these leaflets are attached).

Press Media

In order to maximize our reach to the community, we held a press conference to launch our GM food homepage and invited the media to attend the public forums mentioned below. The events received reasonably good coverage in the press media. We have also written a number of articles for publication in the newspapers.

Public Consultation

4. We have organized two public forums concerning GM food. These forums seek:-
 - (a) to enable the public to have a more comprehensive understanding about GM food;
 - (b) to involve all stakeholders including the professionals, the food trade and the consumers and facilitate the exchange of information and views on GM food safety and labelling; and
 - (c) to gather public opinion on an appropriate regulatory framework for GM food.

First Public Forum on Safety of GM Food

5. The forum was held on 31 March 2000 and focused on the safety of GM food. In brief, speakers from the academic circle were of the view that modern biotechnology (including the production of GM food) was beneficial to the humanity whilst representatives from green groups were concerned about the environmental impact of the technology. The majority of participants agreed

that there was no scientific evidence to suggest that GM food currently available in the market was inherently unsafe for human consumption. A summary report on the forum is at Annex A. The transcript of discussions has been uploaded to the GM food homepage (<http://info.gov.hk/fehd/safefood/gmf/index1c.html>).

Second Public Forum on Labelling of GM Food

6. The second forum was held on 4 May 2000 and the discussions focused on the need for labelling of GM food. In brief, speakers from the academic circle supported a labelling system based on differences (if any) between GM food and its traditional counterpart in product characteristics such as nutritional value, toxicology, allergic properties, etc. Some environmental groups however advocated mandatory labelling for all GM food. The Consumer Council supported labelling for consumer information. Representatives from the food trade suggested phase-by-phase implementation of any mandatory labelling requirements, starting with a voluntary labeling scheme. The majority of the participants were of the view that there should be some sort of labelling system for GM food. A summary report on the forum is at Annex B. The transcript of the discussions is under preparation and will be uploaded onto FEHD's GM food homepage by mid-June.

Study of Overseas Experience

7. The application of biotechnology in food production is a new and evolving development. The introduction of GM food for human consumption thus poses challenges for governments and regulatory agencies around the world. Our research on international experience reveals that approaches and measures adopted in regulating of GM food differ from country to country and are still evolving. The following paragraphs briefly describe the main approaches to GM food labeling developed so far.

The United States (US) and Canada

8. In US and Canada, mandatory labelling is only required when GM food is not substantially equivalent to their traditional counterparts. The concept of substantial equivalence is endorsed by the World Health Organisation and the Food and Agriculture Organisation as the basis for safety assessment of GM food. Under this concept, if GM food is of the same nutritional value, toxicology and allergic property as its conventional counterpart, it is considered to be just as safe as the latter.

9. The US and Canada believe that advising consumers of the potential adverse health impact (e.g. toxicology, allergen, etc.) is paramount among other

information such as production technology associated with the food product. Hence, labelling of GM is only required when the food deviates from its conventional counterpart in any of its product characteristics.

10. To supplement the mandatory labelling requirement on substantial different food, they are developing guidelines on voluntary labelling of GM food for the benefit of manufacturers who wish to have such labels on their food.

The European Union (EU)

11. Countries of the EU, on the other hand, have resolved to require all food containing any ingredients with more than 1% GM material to be labelled starting from April 2000. The 1% threshold is established for practical reasons in law enforcement, e.g. accuracy of available tests, accidental inclusion of GM material in transportation process, etc.

12. Inherent in the EU pan labelling approach is the view held that food labelling should not be restricted to product characteristics, but should be extended to production and processing means as well. Since some people are concerned about ethical, social or environmental issues surrounding the production process of GM food, the EU countries consider that consumers should have the “right to know” about whether a particular food item has undergone genetic modification. Hence, all GM food should be labelled regardless of its equivalence in product characteristics to traditional food.

Australia and New Zealand

13. In Australia and New Zealand, the existing legislation (which came into effect in May 1999) only requires labelling of GM food which is not substantially equivalent to its traditional counterparts. Recently, the joint Australian and New Zealand Food Authority decided to extend mandatory labelling to all GM food. Labelling standards and compliance guide were drafted for this purpose and issued for public consultation in January 2000. Studies were also commissioned to assess the cost implication of the proposal in parallel. Both countries are now considering the way forward on whether, and if so how, to implement pan labelling of GM food.

Japan

14. Japan has prepared a draft regulation, which requires 5 agricultural products (including soyabean, corn, potato, rapeseed and cottonseed) and 28 processed food items containing GM components to be labelled starting April 2001. For the 28 selected processed food items, the proposed requirement is such that if

any of the top 3 constituents account for 5% or more of the total product weight and have been genetically modified, then that particular food item should be labelled. Practical considerations such as availability of proper testing methods for GM material detection are the main reason why a selective approach has been chosen.

South Korea

15. South Korea has announced mandatory labelling requirements for GM corn, soya bean and bean sprout and their processed products. For the whole food, the requirement would come into force in March 2001 when products containing 5% or more GM material are to be labelled as such. For the related processed food, the labelling requirement would come into force in July 2001.

Other Countries

16. Many Asian economies have yet to decide on a GM labelling system and are considering whether and how to develop such a system.

Attendance of International Meetings

17. There is at present no international consensus on the regulation of GM food. The Codex Alimentarius Commission¹ is working on standards and guidelines for labelling of GM food. We attended two such meetings in March and May 2000 during which the *Proposed Draft Recommendations for the Labelling of Foods Obtained Through Biotechnology* were discussed. Two options are included in the draft paper: Option 1 which basically follows the existing labelling practice in the US, i.e. only GM food which is not substantially equivalent to its conventional counterpart is to be labelled; and Option 2 which basically follows the existing EU approach, i.e. pan labelling of all food which contains GM ingredient over a certain threshold level.

18. The task ahead for Codex is to narrow the gap between the two options and come to an recommendation which is acceptable to all Member economies. Due to the complexity of the issues involved, results of this standardizing exercise are not expected to be available before 2003.

¹ The Codex Alimentarius Commission under the United Nations is recognized by the World Health Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Trade Organization as the international authority for setting of food related standards.

WAY FORWARD

19. Our study on the feasibility of setting up a labelling system for GM food will focus on the following issues in the coming six months:

- (a) To study the pros and cons of the various labelling approaches adopted by other countries in greater detail with special reference to our own circumstances and needs;
- (b) To continue to closely monitor related developments in the international arena, including the adoption of any new regulatory measures on GM food and the progress of Codex in devising international standards for labelling of GM food;
- (c) To initiate discussions with the local food trade on the feasibility of various labelling options, including “GM free” labels, voluntary GM food labels, etc.;
- (d) To develop our testing capability in conjunction with the Government Laboratory to prepare ourselves for the introduction and enforcement of any GM food labelling; and
- (e) To examine the testing capacities of local private laboratories regarding detection of GM materials and to identify scope for collaboration. As these private laboratories could serve as service providers to the local food trade as and when GM food labelling becomes necessary, it will be timely to assess their readiness.

20. We aim to complete the study in the last quarter of 2000 and put forward a proposal on the way forward regarding labelling of GM food in Hong Kong for public consultation by end 2000/early 2001. We will consult the relevant LegCo Panel and the Advisory Council on Food and Environmental Hygiene on the way forward.

Environment and Food Bureau
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department
5 June 2000

**REPORT OF PUBLIC FORUM ON
SAFETY OF GENETICALLY MODIFIED FOOD
(Forum I)**

PURPOSE

This note gives a brief report on the first public forum on genetically modified (GM) food organized by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD).

FORMAT OF FORUM

2. The theme of the forum is on safety of GM food. The forum was held at the Lecture Hall, Hong Kong Science Museum on 31 March 2000. It was divided into two parts: the first part - presentations given by speakers; and the second part - plenary discussions. The forum was conducted in Cantonese with English simultaneous interpretation and lasted around three and half hours.

3. Five speakers presented their views on safety of GM food. They were representatives of the Hong Kong Medical Association, the Greenpeace, the local academia and the Administration. Some 260 audience, who filled up over 90% of the Lecture Hall, attended the forum. They came from various sectors including the medical profession, the academia, the food trade, the environmental groups, the Consumer Council, the District Councils, local consulates and the general public.

VIEWS COLLECTED

4. Details of all views expressed at the forum has been recorded in the transcript and uploaded onto the Internet (<http://info.gov.hk/fehd/safefood/gmf/index1c.html>). The following is a brief summary of the views expressed by speakers and audience.

Views of Speakers

5. Prof. SSM SUN and Prof. RSC WONG, two academia from local tertiary institutes, asserted that GM food was just as safe as its conventional

counterparts and genetic modification could bring benefits to the humanity by increasing crop yields, enhancing nutritional value, reducing use of pesticides, etc.

6. Dr. WL LO, representative from the Hong Kong Medical Association, reckoned that current medical evidence did not show GM food having any immediate adverse health effect. Nevertheless, he was concerned about the possibility of accidental introduction of allergen to food by GM technology and the potential long-term health effect of GM food.

7. Mr. SP LO, representative of the Greenpeace, expressed great concern over the potential threats of GM technology to the environment, such as development of super weeds or super pests, damage to biodiversity, disturbance to ecosystem, etc. As a result, he proposed a total ban on GM food.

8. Dr. YY HO, representative of FEHD, discussed the safety assessment and possible regulatory measures for GM food.

Views of Audience

9. Most audience shared the view that GM food currently available on the market was safe for human consumption. They expressed that public education and public discussion were effective means for enhancing the community's understanding on the subject of GM food safety.

10. Some members of the audience expressed their concern over the environmental impact of GM food. Some audience suggested that considerations should be given to factors such as social acceptance of risks, in addition to food safety, when devising the regulation framework for GM food.

Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

May 2000

**REPORT OF PUBLIC FORUM ON
LABELLING OF GENETICALLY MODIFIED (GM) FOOD
(Forum II)**

PURPOSE

This note gives a brief report on the second public forum on genetically modified (GM) food organized by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD).

FORMAT OF FORUM

2. The theme of the forum is on labelling of GM food. The forum was held at the Lecture Hall, Hong Kong Science Museum on 4 May 2000. It was divided into three parts: the first part – presentations given by speakers; the second part – panel discussions; and the third part – plenary discussions (detailed programme run-down is at Appendix B-1). The forum was conducted in Cantonese with English simultaneous interpretation and lasted around three and half hours.

3. Six speakers presented their views on labelling of GM food. They were representatives from the Hong Kong Food Council, the Consumer Council, the Greenpeace, the local academia and the Administration. Some 280 audience, who filled up over 90% of the Lecture Hall, attended the forum. Audience came from various sectors including medical profession, the academia, the food trade, the environmental groups, the consumer groups, the District Councils, the Advisory Council on Food and Environmental Hygiene, local consulates and the general public.

VIEWS COLLECTED

4. Details of all views expressed at the forum have been recorded in the transcript and will be uploaded onto the Internet before mid June. (homepage address: <http://info.gov.hk/fehd/safefood/gmf/index1c.html>). The following is a brief summary of the views expressed by speakers and audience.

Views of Panel Speakers

5. Prof. SSM SUN and Dr. RSC WONG, two academia from local tertiary institutes, expressed their concerns over the cost implications of labelling, the limitation of detection tests for GM material, and hence their reservation towards pan labelling of all GM food. Prof. SSM SUN recommended that GM food should be labelled when it: (1) was substantially different from its traditional counterpart in terms of composition and nutrition; or (2) contained allergen; or (3) contained animal genes.

6. Mr. SP LO, representative of the Greenpeace, was concerned about the potential environmental impact of GM crops and consumers' right to know. Hence he supported labelling of all GM food.

7. Mr. B CHENG, representative from the Consumer Council, expressed his support for a labelling system which would facilitate consumers to make informed choices. He believed that test costs would gradually decrease after the implementation of a mandatory labelling system.

8. Mr. KL LEE, representative from the food trade, supported the labelling of GM food. Nonetheless, he suggested that the Government should introduce mandatory labelling in phases and the trade might practise voluntary labelling in the interim.

9. Dr. YY HO, representative of FEHD, shared with the audience international practices in GM food labelling and factors to be considered in setting up a labelling system.

Views of Audience

10. The majority of the audience was of the view that labelling for GM food should be introduced in Hong Kong so as to enable consumers making informed choices. However, views regarding exactly which labelling approach to be adopted were diversified, with some supporting selective labelling and other supporting pan labelling for all GM food.

11. Some audience expressed their concern over costs associated with testing and labelling and hence feared that mandatory pan labelling would

force some small to medium sized food companies run out of business. Some representatives from the food trade also worried that GM labelling might pose a technical barrier to food importation.

Food and Environmental Hygiene Department
May 2000

KNOW MORE -
**GENETICALLY
MODIFIED FOOD**

The Fundamentals



FOOD AND ENVIRONMENTAL HYGIENE DEPARTMENT

I. NEW TECHNOLOGY - GENETIC MODIFICATION (GM)

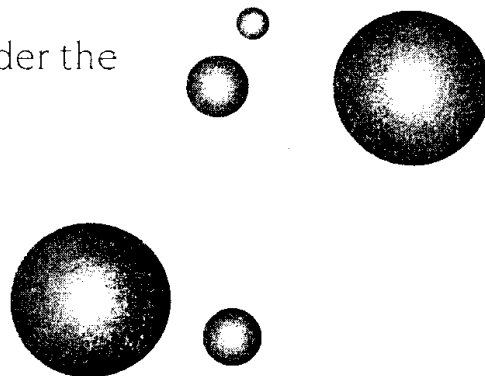
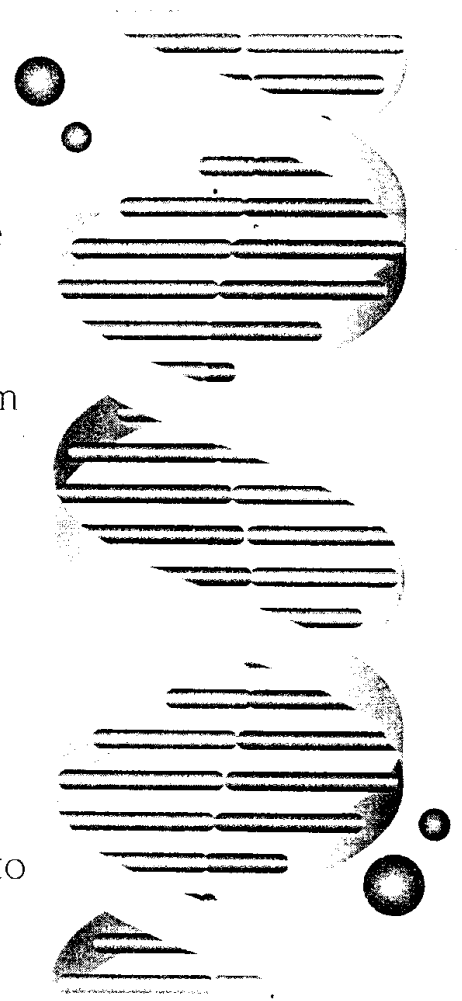
1. *What are genes?*

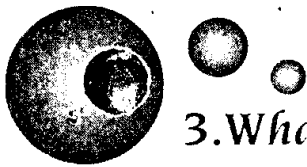
Genes are made of DNA (Deoxyribose Nucleic Acid). A gene is a unit of hereditary material, which carries the information to produce protein that determine the characteristics of an organism. Plants and animals, from which foods are derived, have thousands of genes in their cells.

2. *Where do GM foods come from?*

Without knowing the exact mechanism, farmers centuries ago made use of various breeding methods to produce grains and plants which were bigger, tastier or easier to grow. Nowadays, scientists are learning to identify and modify genes controlling specific characteristics through the development of modern biotechnology. With the help of biotechnology, genes can be more selectively and precisely inactivated, or transferred from one organism to another to produce so-called genetically modified organisms (GMOs).

Any food derived from this way is put under the umbrella of the name 'GM food'.





3. What are the differences between genetic modification and traditional breeding?

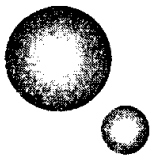
Both genetic modification and traditional breeding involve altering the genetic make-up of living organisms so as to produce the desired traits. However, the two techniques have the following differences -

GENETIC MODIFICATION

- isolation and transfer of well-defined genes
- introduction of desired genes across the species barrier
- faster and less costly
- desired changes can be achieved in one generation

TRADITIONAL BREEDING

- crossing of thousands of genes at one time
- gene transfer usually within species
- more time consuming in the process of observation and natural selection to achieve the desired characteristics



4. What are the examples of GM crops/foods?

GM foods available on the market come in many forms. Some are whole foods like crops, but most are processed foods. The characteristics of the GM foods currently available on the market are similar to their traditional counterparts, except they may have the advantages of being more resistant to herbicides or insects, lower wastage rate, etc. Some examples of GM foods are -

CROP

GM TRAIT

COMMON FOOD PRODUCTS

SOYBEAN

Herbicide tolerance

soy beverages, tofu, soy oil, soy flour, emulsifiers (i.e. lecithin), and as ingredients in breads, pastries and edible oil, etc.

CORN

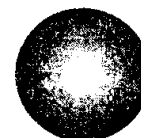
Insect resistance
Herbicide tolerance

corn oil, flour, sugar or syrup, and as ingredients in snacks, bakery, confectionery and soft drinks, etc.

TOMATO

Delay softening of tissue

Tomato puree, tomato juice, etc.



II. POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF GM FOODS

Why did scientists start research and development of GM foods?

It is because researchers envisage the development of GM foods will help -

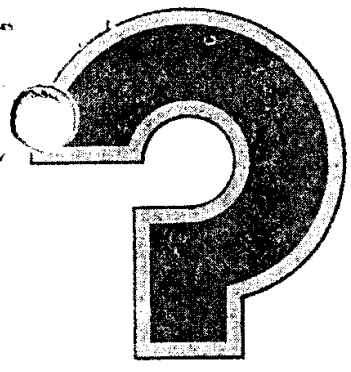
- Increase crop yields
- Increase the tolerance of crops to adverse growing conditions, e.g. drought
- Improve the nutrient composition of crops, e.g. increase the protein content of rice
- Provide resistance to crop pests and reduce the use of pesticides
- Improve sensory attributes of food, e.g. flavour, texture
- Improve processing characteristics so as to reduce wastage and costs
- Eliminate allergy-causing properties in some foods

III. CONCERNS OVER GM FOODS/CROPS

What are the concerns over GM foods/crops of green and consumer groups ?

- unintended modification of similar species in the neighbouring fields due to cross pollination
- disturbing the balance of ecosystems
- development of super pests
- whether it is acceptable to move genes between plants or animals which do not normally interbreed
- some people may worry about eating food containing genes from something they would not eat for religious, health or other reasons





IV. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. How long have GM foods been on the market?

The application of modern biotechnology in food production was started in the 90s. The first GM whole food, FLAVR SAVR™ tomato, was marketed in the United States in 1994.

2. What are the most common GM food ingredients or food products in the market?

The most common GM food ingredients currently available in the market are soybean, corn, potato and tomato. Soybeans may be further processed into soy oil and soy flour to make food items such as pastries, edible oil and other soy products. Corn may be further processed into corn oil, flour or syrup to make food items such as snacks, bakery and soft drinks.

3. Which countries are the major producers of GM foods?

The biggest producer of GM crops/foods is the United States, followed by Argentina and Canada.

4. How to identify GM foods in the market?

Basically, physical appearances of most GM foods are similar to their conventional counterparts. Biochemical analyses such as Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) or Enzyme Linked Immunosorbent Assay (ELISA) are ways to differentiate them.

5. Will the development of herbicide-resistant crops actually increase the use of herbicide by farmers?

In general, herbicide-resistant crops will reduce the use of herbicides. The herbicide-resistant crops are usually resistant to "new generation" herbicides that are less toxic and less persistent in the environment. The development of crops with resistance to these herbicides may increase the use of these "new generation" herbicides but may at the same time decrease the use of herbicides that are more persistent in the environment. Nevertheless, the use of herbicides is regulated to ensure that human health is not adversely affected.

V. GET MORE INFORMATION

Local Government Agencies

Environment and Food Bureau

<http://www.info.gov.hk/efb>

Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

<http://www.fehd.gov.hk>

Regional Food Safety Authorities

Australia New Zealand Food Authority

<http://www.anzfa.gov.au>

Canadian Food Inspection Agency

<http://www.cfia-acia.agr.ca>

European Commission - Scientific Committee on Food

http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/dg24/health/sc/scf/index_en.html

Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (United Kingdom)

<http://www.maff.gov.uk>

U.S. Food and Drug Administration

<http://vm.cfsan.fda.gov>

International Organisations

World Health Organisation

<http://www.who.int/fsf>

Food and Agriculture Organisation

<http://www.fao.org>

Codex Alimentarius Commission

<http://www.fao.org/WAICENT/FAOINFO/ECONOMIC/ESN/codex/default.htm>

Professional Organisations of Food Science and Technology

Institute of Food Science and Technology (UK)

<http://www.ifst.org>

International Life Sciences Institute

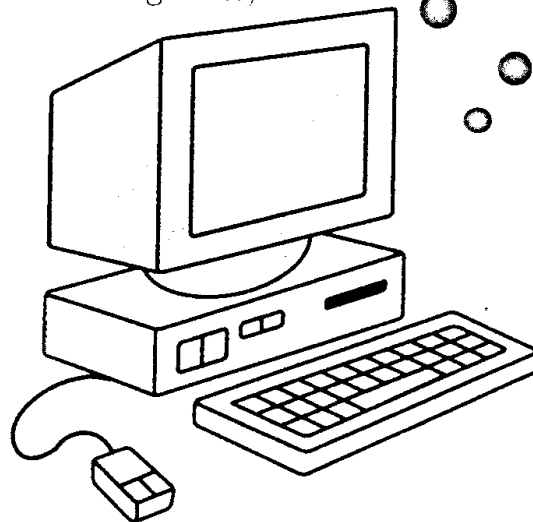
<http://www.ilsa.org/europe.html>

The Royal Society

<http://www.royalsoc.ac.uk>

Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Enquiries Hotline :2868 0000 Email: enquiries@fehd.gov.hk



KNOW MORE -
GENETICALLY

Safety & Labelling



FOOD AND ENVIRONMENTAL HYGIENE DEPARTMENT

I. SAFETY OF GM FOODS

1. Is GM food safe for human consumption?

World Health Organisation (WHO) and Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) have concluded that the use of modern biotechnology (including genetic modification) does not result in food which is inherently less safe than that produced by conventional techniques.

2. Have GM foods been assessed before they are available in the market? How?

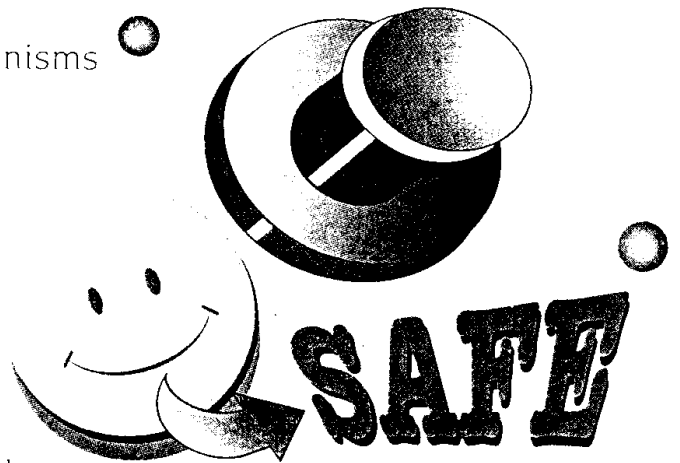
Since the use of modern biotechnology in food is a recent development, as a safety measure, all GM foods are subjected to rigorous safety assessments by the industry and regulatory agencies of the places of origin before they are put into the market. In the case of the United States, where GM crops are most abundant, GM foods are regulated by three federal agencies: the Food and Drug Administration, the Environmental Protection Agency and the United States Department of Agriculture, who are responsible for safety and environmental assessments. Only when the conditions laid down by these three agencies are fully satisfied, will a particular GM food be allowed to be released into the market. The assessments, including that performed by the manufacturers, may take several years to complete and are comprehensive.

The safety assessments are based on the principle of "substantial equivalence" which was endorsed by WHO/FAO and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The concept of substantial equivalence is that if the new food item or component is found to be substantially equivalent to an existing food or component, the food or component is considered to be as safe as its conventional counterpart. Key considerations include :

- Characteristics of the donor and host organisms
- Composition
- Dietary intake
- Nutritional data
- Toxicological data
- Allergenic properties

Where differences are identified, additional assessments and animal studies will be carried out.

To date, all GM foods available in the market have been assessed as substantially equivalent to their conventional counterparts and none of them have been proved as unfit for human consumption.



II. LABELLING OF GM FOODS

1. *What are the approaches of GM food labelling?*

Approaches in GM food labelling differ from country to country and are still evolving. In general, there are two schools of thoughts: (i) Consumers' "right to know" should be protected and all products containing GM materials should be labelled to enable consumers to make informed choices; (ii) Mandatory labelling will produce a negative image on GM foods and since GM foods available in the market are safe, only those that are not substantially equivalent should be labelled.

2. *What are the international practices on labelling of GM foods?*

The international community is working towards a consensual policy on GM food labelling. Problems to address include the definition of substantial equivalence, the problem of contamination in the process of production and transportation, etc. However, the Codex Alimentarius Commission of the United Nations is unlikely to be able to set internationally agreed standards before 2003. Policies on GM food labelling in some other places are highlighted as follows :

a) North America

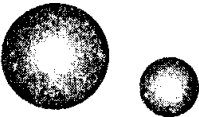
Labelling of GM foods is required only if the food is not substantially equivalent to its conventional counterpart in terms of either composition, nutrition or toxicology.

b) Europe

All products containing GM ingredients have to be labelled in countries of the European Union since 1998. Recently, the European Commission has amended its policy that food products containing more than 1% genetically modified materials are required to be labelled from April 2000. However, all member countries have to amend their relevant regulations on GM foods before the enforcement of this new policy.



c) Australia and New Zealand

From May 1999, GM foods are required to be labelled if they are not substantially equivalent to their counterparts. Subsequently, the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Council (ANZFS) decided to amend the standard to extend the labelling requirement to all GM foods. The acceptance of new labelling standards is pending public consultation.


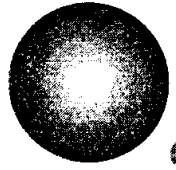




d) Asia

Japan has drafted regulation, which requires 28 food items containing genetically modified materials to be labelled from April 2001. This regulation will also apply to GM foods that are not substantially equivalent to their conventional counterparts. However, labelling is not required for oil and sauce, where the original genetically modified materials can no longer be detected. The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry in South Korea has announced that labelling of genetically modified corn, soya bean and bean sprout will come into force in March 2001.



In Mainland China, the Ministry of Public Health promulgated Novel Food Regulation in early 90s. All novel foods, which include GM foods, are subject to safety assessments by a special committee before they are released into the market. They also have to be labelled "novel food" on their packages. However, specific regulations on GM foods are still under development. Other countries/regions, like Singapore and Taiwan, as well as HKSARG, are also considering the way forward for GM food labelling.



III. SITUATION IN HONG KONG


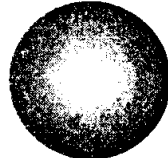
1. Is there any production of GM crops in Hong Kong?

Hong Kong does not have any commercial production of GM crops or livestock to date. However, there are biotechnological research studies conducting in universities. Local scientists have not yet conducted any field trials.

2. Is the Government aware of the availability of any GM foods in Hong Kong? Is there any control on GM foods currently?

Some food products on shelves are known to contain genetically modified ingredients. These materials are proven to be safe for human consumption by the trade and regulating agencies of their places of origin before they are available in the market.

Under Part V of the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap. 132), food intended for sale in Hong Kong must be fit for human consumption. The Ordinance applies to all foods including genetically modified ones.

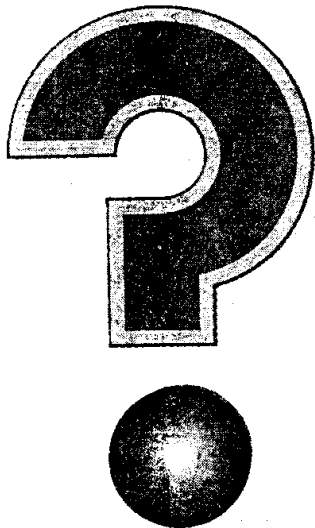


3. What is the future policy on GM foods in Hong Kong?

As the range of GM foods available on the market increases, the issue of better consumer information through labelling is receiving priority concern. The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department is studying the feasibility of setting up a GM food labelling system. Issues that need to be considered include :

- International practices
- Costs of compliance and the implications for the food industry and consumers
- Enforcement and testing

In the meantime, the Department will strengthen public education in this area to provide the public with accurate and balanced information. Public forums will be organised to collect opinions from the public and the trade. The Advisory Council on Food and Environmental Hygiene, an advisory committee comprising food academics, representatives from the trade and consumer groups, will be consulted.



IV. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. *Is it possible that GM foods currently available contain animal genes?*

There is no GM foods currently on sale containing animal genes. To the best of our knowledge, these kinds of products are still in the research stage. These products will be subjected to stringent safety assessments by the industry and food authorities of their place of origin

before they are available in the market.

2. *What are the major concerns of green and consumer groups?*

- The major concern of green groups is the possible environmental impact of GM crops.
- The major concern of consumer groups, as well as the concerns of some green groups, is consumers' "right to know" through labelling.

V. GET MORE INFORMATION

Local Government Agencies

Environment and Food Bureau

<http://www.info.gov.hk/efb>

Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

<http://www.fehd.gov.hk>

Regional Food Safety Authorities

Australia New Zealand Food Authority

<http://www.anzfa.gov.au>

Canadian Food Inspection Agency

<http://www.cfia-acia.agr.ca>

European Commission - Scientific Committee on Food

http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/dg24/health/sc/scf/index_en.html

Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (United Kingdom)

<http://www.maff.gov.uk>

U.S. Food and Drug Administration

<http://vm.cfsan.fda.gov>

International Organisations

World Health Organisation

<http://www.who.int/fsf>

Food and Agriculture Organisation

<http://www.fao.org>

Codex Alimentarius Commission

<http://www.fao.org/WAICENT/FAOINFO/ECONOMIC/ESN/codex/default.htm>

Professional Organisations of Food Science and Technology

Institute of Food Science and Technology (UK)

<http://www.ifst.org>

International Life Sciences Institute

<http://www.ilsa.org/europe.html>

The Royal Society

<http://www.royalsoc.ac.uk>

Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

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