



COUNCIL FOR SCIENTIFIC AND INDUSTRIAL RESEARCH

FOOD RESEARCH INSTITUTE

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POSITION ON GMO LABELLING IN GHANA

INTRODUCTION

There are several controversies surrounding GMO with some proponents vouching for the introduction of GMOs while others condemn its introduction with yet another group being passive about its introduction. Genetic modification of foods have been deemed as beneficial due to, for example, its potential to reduce use of chemicals for breeding/planting and also improving nutritional properties of foods to enhance human health. On the other hand, modifying naturally occurring organs, including foods may give rise to random, accidental mutations in the organism with health consequences to the end-user (Ghana Public Health Association, 2014). The initiation of an agenda to establish GMO labeling rules has come at the right time and therefore is lauded by the CSIR Food Research Institute.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Food Research Institute is recommending a legislation which makes the labeling of foods made from or containing GMOs mandatory. The two basic reasons for Food Research's position for the labeling of foods made from or containing GMOs are

1. Facilitating consumer choice: It has been reported that about 90% of consumers in France, Canada and America have endorsed the compulsory labeling of GM foods to ensure transparency and facilitate consumer choice. (Maghari and Ardekani, 2011). It is argued that consumers make choices based on religious, moral, ethical and safety issues.
 - a. **Religious reasons:** Some Christians are averse to anything which they believe are not from God citing several biblical quotes e.g. '*And God said, "Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth." And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good*' Genesis 1:11-12. Muslims also believe that the genetic manipulation of organisms is unnatural and championed by satan (Quran 4:119) since it tampers with God's plan.

- b. **Ethical reasons:** Consumers who are ecological friendly are averse to activities which damage the environment. Some of these activities include the use of potentially dangerous genes in other known safe foods which may trigger allergenic reactions.
 - c. **Moral reasons:** Some consumers have expressed misgivings about the production of GMO seeds by leading producers which may monopolize the global agricultural food chain and control distribution of such around the world, lending them too much power relating to food distribution.
 - d. **Safety reasons:** There is still very scanty information about the long-term health effects of GMO foods. Generally, all foods are considered unsafe until proven safe through a comprehensive Risk Assessment.
 2. Enhancing post-market surveillance and control: This seeks to prevent unauthorized and/or unintended release of GMO into the environment and/or expose population to unapproved GMO. This will limit fraudulent activities by food processors and provide consumers with foods whose origins are traceable. Furthermore, the possible negative health effects as a result of consuming GMO-based foods over a long period can be identified through post-market monitoring and surveillance.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

It is strongly believed that mandatory labeling of GMO-based foods will have a neutral impact on Ghana's bio-economy. This is because there is currently a lack of a comprehensive Risk Assessment data on the effect of GMOs on Ghanaian consumers. Furthermore mandatory labeling would afford consumers the opportunity to make informed choices however mandatory labeling could possibly lead to increased production cost and stigmatization of GM labeled foods (Oh & Obidimma, 2014). There would also be the challenge of labeling food / produce sold in open markets, road side markets and street foods.

REFERENCES

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