

The TPPA, genetic modification, and food safety

The New Zealand government is negotiating an international agreement that could have a huge effect on the lives of ordinary kiwis. It's called the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA), and it involves eleven Asian and Pacific-rim countries, including the United States. If it goes ahead, we risk damage to our innovative economy, our pristine environment, our health, and the ability to shape our own future.

Because the negotiations are being conducted in secret, what we know about the TPPA comes from leaked documents and detective work. This is not acceptable. We live in a democracy, which means we have the right to know what is done in our name and to have a say.

One of the many causes for concern around the TPPA is its potential effect on the regulation of genetically modified organisms, and on the safety of our food.

Genetic modification

New Zealanders are wary about genetic modification. In 2001 The Royal Commission on Genetic Modification asked what we thought about GM, and we came back against it – we didn't want to risk our health or our amazing natural world, we wanted to respect tangata whenua beliefs, and we didn't trust big business to look out for our interests. Being GM-free has become part of who we are, the same as being nuclear free. It's not just kiwis who see ourselves that way – our 100% pure, clean-green image is how we are seen by the world, and is a big advantage to our economy.

The TPPA negotiations are putting our anti-GM stance at risk. Away from the public eye, the United States and its big business lobbyists are looking to lock in a new set of rules to open our fields and our supermarket shelves to genetically modified organisms.

Labelling of genetically modified products

At the moment, any food with more than 1% GM content has to be labelled. This way, we get to choose whether or not we bring GMO into our homes. Because supermarkets know we don't like GM, they generally don't bother stocking GM products.

It's no secret that the United States trade negotiators want us to get rid of our GM labelling rules. The annual US report on New Zealand's 'trade barriers' confirmed that they will "continue to raise trade-related concerns with mandatory biotechnology labelling regimes". The Biotech Industry Organisation – who represent the world's giant GMO companies like



It is our right to know what is in our food. If the TPPA is signed we will lose the right to have labeling of GE food. Labeling of GE food is the best way to oppose the GE corporate takeover that brings serious environmental, health, and legal issues. How can we vote with our feet if we don't know what's in our food? Lisa's Hummus was possibly the first product in the world to label GM and preservative free. The business grew because of this. If New Zealand stays GE free in field and food, we have a huge business opportunity to supply the GE free market worldwide, and so labeling is essential.

– Lisa Er, Founder of Lisa's Hummus.



The TPP, genetic modification, and food safety – continued

Monsanto and Cargill – have also **stated**¹ that they want GM labelling restricted under the TPPA.

83% of New Zealanders are in favour of GM labelling, so let's make sure our government doesn't scrap it behind our backs – if they do the only winners will be the giant US agri-businesses who want to sell us their GM products.

Genetically modified crops

New Zealand law is pretty tough about introducing GM crops, and public opinion suggests that we want to keep it that way. Fortunately, all the major political parties seem to **agree**². However, our GMO rules are at risk – the US lead negotiator is **on record**³ stating that the US wants to use the TPP negotiations to promote agricultural biotechnology within the negotiating countries.

Food safety

GM aside, New Zealand has many other rules to make sure that plant and animal products are safe for New Zealanders and our environment – rules about how much pesticide residue can be present on our food, how food products are preserved and transported, and about testing to make sure imported products meet our standards. These rules (called “Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures” and “Technical Barriers to Trade”) are especially important to New Zealand because we need to protect our unique eco-system and our extensive agricultural and horticultural industries.

There are already international rules around how countries set their own measures. The US and its **farmers lobby**⁴ is pushing for all TPPA countries to adopt a more coordinated approach. Under the TPPA we risk losing the right to decide for ourselves how we protect our people and the environment, instead having to follow a set of rules secretly negotiated overseas.

Worse, if we brought in new rules to restrict dangerous additives or toxic residues, investors from those countries could sue the New Zealand government for compensation in a private international tribunal. This happened in Canada last year when the giant US chemical company DowAgroSciences **sued Quebec**⁵ for banning the use of a dangerous pesticide, using an agreement called NAFTA that does not go nearly as far as proposals for the TPPA.

Just the threat of a long and expensive court case with a rich multinational company can be enough to get governments to back down on environmental protection measures. This isn't right – the environment should come before corporate profits.

“Does the TPPA sound like something New Zealand should be a part of?”



Links:

1. <http://www.bilaterals.org/IMG/pdf/20090311.pdf>
2. http://sustainabilitynz.org/news_item.asp?SID=230
3. <http://waysandmeans.house.gov/uploadedfiles/qfrsfinal.pdf>
4. [http://www.uswheat.org/whatWeDo/tradePolicy/tradeAgreement/doc/A8962733268EE35C85257A4B005E031D/\\$File/U.S.%20Ag%20Community%20Letter%20on%20TPP%20SPS%20Provisions_July%2026%202012.pdf?OpenElement](http://www.uswheat.org/whatWeDo/tradePolicy/tradeAgreement/doc/A8962733268EE35C85257A4B005E031D/$File/U.S.%20Ag%20Community%20Letter%20on%20TPP%20SPS%20Provisions_July%2026%202012.pdf?OpenElement)
5. <http://www.sierraclub.ca/en/trade-and-environment/nafta-dispute-settlement-over-quebec-pesticide-ban-has-both-sides-claiming-vic>
6. www.itsourfuture.org.nz/take-action/
7. www.avaaz.org/en/stop_the_corporate_death_star/
8. www.itsourfuture.org.nz/news/

Subject: Genetic modification and food safety
Date: 09.10.2012
More at: www.itsourfuture.org.nz
Speak to us: media@itsourfuture.org.nz