Organic Industries of Australia Ltd
60 Investigator Street
RED HILL ACT 2603
0448 439334

28 November 2024

FSANZ

Re: P1055

Dear Sir/Madam,

It is with some concern that I write you on this important issue.

FSANZ Position

Please confirm the following are true and correct statements:

1. All strains/iterations of GE Corn & GE Soy are now considered safe for commercial release in Australia. This is founded on the bases of their prior monitored release and considered resolution of nil harm to the community resulting in considered resolution that such products are no longer required to be labelled as GE or GMO.

2. Mandatory labelling of GE or GMO is predicated on the extent of harm, the substance or organism is considered to represent to the Australian community, where if there is a low level of harm, then labelling is not required, and if there is a high level of harm then labelling is required.

3. The definition of GMO assumes a live/viable organism, wherein the de-naturing of such organisms renders their status as GMO, null and void, and thereafter not requiring labelling.

4. De-natured GE material is not considered a GMO, and does not require labelling in Australia. This is no doubt based on a presumption that GE substances do not represent potential harm or in any way impact the environment.

DAFF National Organic Standard

It is true we propose, that the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry states in the National Organic & Bio-Dynamic Standard (National Standard):

> 1.2.6 GMO products are not compatible with organic and bio-dynamic management practices and are not permitted under a parallel production system.

1.7.3 The use of genetically modified/engineered seed and transgenic plants or the application of GMO derived substances for treating plants is prohibited in organic and bio-dynamic farming.

1.17.8 Caution must be applied when using allopathic veterinary drugs as some medications (especially vaccines) may contain GMO or GMO derived substances. Where such medications are derived from GMO production, the animal(s) and/or their produce will never regain in-conversion, organic or bio-dynamic certification status.

In the event of GE or GMO contamination, under the National Standard the result is de-certification for a period of 5 years from the last application, restricting the ability of the operator to substantiate a claim or organic status in their product or service during this period.

Organic Industry

FIFTY FIVE MILLION HECTARES (55 million hectares) of certified organic land in Australia supporting an AUD$2.1billion market, and wherein Australia presides over more than half of the worlds certified organic land as a globally important source of non-contaminated human food has been endangered and harmed by the policies of genetic engineering regulation in Australia. It is our opinion on the basis of experience that GE & GMO regulators have repeatedly discounted and ignored the representations of the Australian Organic industry in matters related to GE & GMO.

Case study GE Corn & GE Soy

By regulated constraint and considered approvals, GE Corn and GE Soy have been approved for nil requirement of labelling on the basis of tolerable harm to the community.

Since that time, GE Corn & GE Soy have infiltrated processed products on the basis of lower cost production and displaced production on non-GE Corn & non-GE Soy. In de-natured form these ingredients are endemic in stock feeds imported and distributed in Australia.

Organic Operators are challenged in their ability to determine if a stock feed contains GE material in breach of their certification, and the lack of labelling is a determining factor in the obfuscation of the true nature of the subject feed. As a result, diligent organic operators have resorted to extreme measures to preserve the organic status of their animals, in no small measure hindered by regulators possibly complicit in obfuscation of information critical for compliance to other DAFF regulation.

The National Fire Ant Eradication Program (NFAEP) charged with resolution of an invasive pest impacting the community, developed a bait treatment manufactured by Cargill called Engage. The insecticide was approved by APVMA for use as an imported product.

APVMA approval informed the NFAEP on safe environmental (broad including aerial deployment) application of treatments across 850,000ha from Brisbane to Gold Coast to Gatton.

Organic Operators have raised a number of concerns about the safety of the active ingredients including substances formed as part of the degradation process, and the consistency of the degradation assumptions across the practical application including rain events and water catchment. The organic industry was consulted and advice provided based on the rapid degradation and scientific data provided informing special arrangements for addressing temporary contamination of a prohibited chemical.

Ministerial intervention confirmed that the vast majority of the ingredient of the baits is in fact GE or de-natured GMO.

The GE status of the APVMA approved treatment was not widely considered as any cause for concern on the basis of prior approval. This by extension relieved any obligation of labelling, in part causing the lack of consideration.

On the basis of APVMA approval for use, the NFAEP mandated under health and biosecurity concerns broad application use of undisclosed GE material on certified organic farms risking de-certification of such farms for a period of five (5) years from the last contamination event due to GE contamination.

To be clear, the regulator decision not to mandate labelling of GE/GMO in this case caused ignorance of GE/GMO attributes of a mandated biosecurity treatment directly impacting the organic certification status of subject properties.

The various government regulators involved acting within individual scope precipitate the commercial distribution of agvet chemicals, in this instance, without disclosure of GE/GMO content. The avoidance of such labelling renders significant financial harm to about 10% of Australia's agricultural land holders and obfuscates important information from consumers concerned about exposure to GE/GMO through foods produced in Australia. The NFAEP eradication program endangers the organic certification of significant organic exports directly.

We hope this illustrates just one example of the harm of legislated obfuscation of product information.

Summary

It is not only the AUD$2.1billion Australian Organic industry and the 64% of Australian consumers who purchase organic foods in Australia, who are concerned about exposure to GE/GMO. It is also the USD$280 billion global organic market and the policy of the international organic industry bodies[1], and a requirement of foreign organic certification standards to which Australia exports AUD$0.9 billion worth of certified organic goods.

The premise of expert science opinion on the safety of GE/GMO, or the absence of reported harm from GE/GMO, in some way substantiates the obfuscation of such information from product labelling, cannot be defended. The government via its GE/GMO regulators should not be complicit in such

[1] IFOAM General Assembly 2024 Motion M01 – The international organic movement is committed to remaining GMO-free and excludes gene editing (GE).

obfuscation as a means to promote and enhance the commercial revenues of private enterprise promoting such products. Instead we suggest that the appropriate role of the regulators is to protect the Australian community from such obfuscation, and in no way directly or indirectly advantage private enterprise engaged in GE/GMO against traditional non-GE/GMO production / distribution.

Organic Operators Australia pleads with FSANZ to abandon all efforts to, in any way remove the **mandatory obligation to label all genetic engineering or genetically modified organisms** deployed into the Australian community and environment in all forms.

It may be the case that elements of our community believe in the technological & acute medical benefits of genetic engineering, but we must also respect the beliefs of others that adulteration of the biome is a perilous endeavour with unknown consequences. The only mediation of these views is the mandatory disclosure of GE/GMO labelling such that individuals and organisations can make informed decisions about direct exposure / use of such materials. All existing GE or GMOs must also be labelled as a matter of urgency to better inform our certified food systems for both Australian and export market consumers.

ALL GE & GMO MUST BE LABELLED PERIOD.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Hislop Speers
Chair