

Consumers in South Africa have won a hard earned victory with regard to the labelling of genetically modified (GM) foods. Yesterday, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) published draft amendments to the regulations governing the labelling of GM food. According to the draft amendments, **all** locally produced and imported **food containing 5% or more GM ingredients or components**

must be labelled

as "contains genetically modified ingredients or components". The food industry has to date, taken the view that current GM labelling laws are ambiguous and do not apply to processed food.

Mariam Mayet, Director of the African Centre for Biosafety (ACB), congratulated the DTI and praised the huge role played by consumers in demanding their right to know. According to Mayet "the proposed amendments convey the clear intention of government that the food industry must now step up to the plate and label their products."

However, Mayet expressed disappointment that labelling will only be triggered when there is 5% or more GM content. The 5% threshold is not based on any scientific measure but purely on commercial considerations.

South Africa has been growing GM crops since 1999 and consumers have been largely unaware that their staple food, maize, has been genetically modified. South Africa also cultivates GM soya and cotton. Indeed, a large amount of foodstuff on the supermarket shelves contains GM ingredients or components.

Fahri Hassan of SAFeAGE, the organisation that tenaciously fought to have mandatory labelling of GM food included in the Consumer Protection Act in the first place, said he was "delighted that finally, the best interests of the public have been considered and that consumers have won the right to know what they are eating".

The draft amendments are open for public comment until 9 November 2012. It is expected that industry will continue to lobby for weaker regulations and raise spurious arguments as to why they should not label their products. Zakiyya Ismail, ACB labelling campaigner urged all consumers to defend this hard won victory and submit their comments to Mr Ntuzelo Vananda Email: Nvananda@thedti.gov.za .

The draft amendments can be found at http://www.acbio.org.za/ACB_35776_9-10_TradeIndustryCV01.pdf

Contact:

Mariam Mayet 083 269 4309

Fahri Hassan Cell No. +27 72 481 8835

Zakiyya Imail 083 273 7304