

Protestors call for ban on GMOs

Seed producer Monsanto should be stopped from "forcing" genetically modified products on South African consumers, say protesters even though the company assures consumers its products are "thoroughly reviewed" and safe.



Hundreds of activists and lobbyists turned out for a protest at the company's head office in Fourways, Johannesburg last weekend.

The protest coincided with marches against genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and genetically modified food in the United States and other countries.

Genetically modified seeds are engineered to resist pests and herbicides or harsh environmental conditions.

Mariam Mayet, one of the organisers of the march and director of the African Centre for Biosafety, said the aim was to stop Monsanto from selling GMO seeds to South African farmers.

"Virtually all South African maize is now modified. According to recent official reports, more than 80% of white maize and as much as 93% of yellow maize is genetically modified," she said.

"If genetically modified foods were suitable for human consumption, why had countries such as Germany, Japan, New Zealand, Hungary, Bulgaria and Russia banned them," Mayet asked?

Dangers of GMOs

"Recent studies have shown that GMOs may cause cancer. Unfortunately, many South Africans still don't realise they are being sold unnatural, experimental, risky substances as part of their daily diet," she said.

Scientist Dr Christopher Bester, said: "GMOs are a real problem because they can't prevent the genetic modification from spreading. If I farm next to somebody using GMO seeds, my maize would be contaminated even though I don't plant

modified seeds," Bester said.

He said Monsanto have modified 20 crops already and the company intended to modify even more of its seeds.

"We are being taken over by an American company because we are not capable of seeing that they are killing us," he claimed.

Philiswe Dzanibe, one of the protesters, said since she became aware of the dangers of eating food that contain GMOs last year, she had stopped eating maize meal.

"Now I am careful. I read the label before buying anything because I don't want to die young. I just wish we could take the awareness to the townships where people consume large quantities of maize meal as they are not aware that it is dangerous," Dzanibe claimed.

The director of Monsanto in Africa, Kobus Lindeque, said Monsanto took the safety of its products seriously. "Our genetically modified seeds and herbicides are thoroughly reviewed by public health and regulatory authorities," he said.

Source: Sowetan via I-Net Bridge

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