To: jon muller secretary@gefree.org.nz



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Conflict of Interests Behind "No Liability" Clause in New Gene Technology Bill

https://www.gefree.org.nz/press-releases-2019-2023/31102024-conflict-of-interests-behind-no-liability-clause-in-new-gene-technology-bill/



clause for contamination.

The decision to exclude strict liability on users of GM organisms has commercial benefit some sectors of the biotechnology industry but will be setting up the country for farmer-to-farmer conflict and risks a collapse in the evidemand for GE Free food.

The Government's golden goose is the AgResearch genetically engineered GE rye grass which has been shown to be a poor performer compared to existing New Zealand rye grass cultivars which have a superior perform. The GE rye grass product development has been a 20-year process, but if commercialised would be impossible to contain or to prevent contamination of non-GMO production.

In 2011, there was a breach of controls when GE rye grass was allowed to flower, threatening the environment if it had escaped containment. This led to the sacking of the scientist in charge.

The risks have been acknowledged by AgResearch which is no longer testing experimental GE ryegrass but has applied to field test 'conventional rye grass which is genetically engineered with CRISPR/Cas', Epichloe endophytes, AR37, AR5 and AR6, AgResearch are preparing their application so as to be able to test this risky unproven ryegrass endophyte in areas around the country as soon as the new Bill is passed.

Ryegrass has a symbiotic relationship with the Epichloë endophyte fungal strains. Epichloë is notable for having more interspecific hybrids than any other fungal genus. Each strain has unique pest protection. The convent existing AR37, provides resistance against Argentine Stem Weevil, Pasture Mealy Bug, Root Aphid, Black Beetle and Porina grub. AR37 also provided increased ryegrass tiller numbers, root mass and depth, persistence, a higher yields at critical times of the year which allowed better weight gain in sheep. However, AR37 endophyte is not suitable for deer or horse pastures.

This has serious implication for New Zealand pastures as there is no data on the introgression of the GE endophyte to other fungi, endophytes or rye grass. Byegrass flowers around 6 times a year so any GE pollen can af existing rye grass and there is no data on the persistence of the fungal endophyte. This is a serious event as experimental <u>GE bentgrass</u> has easily escaped and become established in areas of the US. A recent study also that the <u>establishment of escaped GE canola</u> now considered a pest and threatened non-GE varieties. <u>Soybean</u> has also been seen to wild and contaminate non-GM varieties.

Once released GE cannot be recalled and contamination through weather events will threaten non-GE seed stocks.

"There must be liability insurance on growers or IP owners to be responsible for contamination spreading to conventional non-GMO, regenerative or organic farms," said Claire Bleakley, president of GE-Free NZ.

"There is a conflict of interest among technical people drafting the Bill as they will benefit financially by the adoption of GMOs and be free of liability. Causing conflict between neighbours.

Export markets for non-GMO food will be threatened, farmers livelihoods will collapse and whole rural communities will suffer. GE is still unproven as to its environmental and health safety, but the Minister Judith Collins has previously directed that precautionary principle is also to be excluded from the Bill.

Evidence shows that GE is unable to compete with selective naturally bred traditional crops in weather extremes, yields are poor, and pest and weeds become resistant to herbicides and insecticides. Organic regenerative are constantly outperforming GE industrial farming systems and are leading the way in climate change and clean green healthy quality food. Our global markets are demanding safe, non-GMO food from Aotearoa. Stay GE New Zealand.

## \* CRISPR -Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats,

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ENDS:

Claire Bleakley president GE Free NZ - 027 348 6731

Jon Carapiet - spokesman GE Free NZ - 0210507681

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