

Submission Cover Sheet

Review of the Moratorium on GM Canola

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Name of Individual/Organisation: Mr Alfred Page

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(03) 9658 4874 or (03) 9658 4871

The human genome may not be a collection of independent genes with each sequence of DNA linked to a single function. Instead, new findings indicate that genes operate in a complex network, and interact with each other in ways that are not yet fully understood.

The idea that genes operate independently is the basis for much of the thought, as well as the economic and regulatory structure, that governs the biotech industry. When recombinant DNA was invented in 1973, scientists believed that genes were associated with specific functions, and that therefore a gene from any organism could fit predictably into a larger design. In the United States, the Patent and Trademark Office allows genes to be patented on the basis of this idea.

These new discoveries raise questions not just about patent law, but also safety issues. Risk assessment of commercial biotech products such as genetically engineered crops to pharmaceuticals is also based on the “one gene, one function” theory. A network of interacting genes can produce unknown, and unpredictable, effects.

New York Times July 1, 2007 (Registration Required)

It's long been presumed that genes in the human body operate independently of one another. The first biotech company was founded on this premise, and the entire \$73.5-billion biotechnology industry as we know it today still adheres to this basic principle.

But anyone who is aware of the biotech industry's tendency to put profits ahead of safety will not be surprised to learn that the principle is completely wrong.

In fact, it's been known for years that genes in other organisms operate as part of a network. Despite this, researchers only translated this knowledge to humans in June, when they reported being “surprised” to learn that the human genome is not a “tidy collection of independent genes”, but a complex interacting network instead.

However, safety studies for biotech products, including genetically modified (GM) foods, pharmaceuticals and more, have all been based on the flawed independent gene theory. Now that gene “network effects” have been acknowledged, it's clear that biotech products could produce any number of unknown effects.

Jack Heinemann, a professor of molecular biology at the University of Canterbury in New Zealand put it quite well when he said, “The real worry for us has always been that the commercial agenda for biotech may be premature, based on what we have long known was an incomplete understanding of genetics.”

This is likely to be just the beginning of the dangerous revelations that will come surrounding GM foods, prescription drugs and other biotech products, and their vastly unknown impacts on your health.

This brings home what many people have known for some time: the effects of genetic modification on the environment and on your health are unexplored territory. GM foods in particular are a massive experiment on a scale never before seen in the history of the human race.

You are an involuntary guinea pig in this risky experiment. More than 75 percent of the processed foods you eat contain GM foods, without labeling and without warning. All the more reason for you to stay away from processed foods as often as you can, and seek out local sources for healthier whole foods.