

# GE-Free New Zealand

in food and environment (RAGE Inc.)

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**GE Free New Zealand in Food & Environment, 09<sup>th</sup> May 2006**

**1820 Sheep died grazing on the harvested GE cotton land. Even wearing GE Cotton could cause terrible skin reactions.**

The latest studies on GE Cotton farming have raised grave concerns about the safety of GE cotton which is widely used in food as well as in clothing.

A preliminary report released in late April has found that thousands of sheep died after grazing on land where GE cotton had been grown. The sheep and goats started dying after seven days of continuously grazing on tender leaves and pods of Bt cotton that remained in the fields after picking.

The incident comes to light just as Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) is considering submissions for approval of GE Cotton seed and oil for use in animal feed and the human food chain. But there is concern that the latest research findings may never be considered by the authorities as the data have been released after the closing date for submissions, and because late submissions are not accepted.

"New findings must be considered fully by the FSANZ as the dire effects reported in this research could go unheeded. After 10 years, we still have no diagnostic tools to assess possible reactions to GE food", says Claire Bleakley of GE Free (NZ) in food and Environment, "GE cotton should be properly tested on animals and humans for safety, but so far it has not."

In December a three month study was released which found that workers picking GE cotton suffered severe skin reactions with itching and blistering eruptions leaving a black skin discolouration which was still apparent after 5 months.

The health of workers must be protected, and also people who buy cotton garments and products made from cotton, like sanitary towels, must be made aware of the possible skin irritations that they may experience.

The British Medical Association has already signalled that GE products could present certain risks, including the creation of drug-resistance in venereal disease as a result of women being exposed to GE constructs in personal hygiene products.

"It is important that cotton products are properly labelled if it has been made from GE cotton fibre" says Ms Bleakley. "Until this happens buyers must seek assurances as to the source of the cotton, or seek to avoid buying products made with cotton from India."

Further, GE Cotton crops have failed in regions of India with many suicides resulting because of the debt accrued from the high cost of growing GE cotton. This has prompted the Indian Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC) to concede after three years of commercial cultivation that Mahyco-Monsanto's Mech-184 Bt, Mech-162 Bt and Mech-12 Bt are a failure. These varieties were banned for commercial cultivation in Andhra Pradesh and Mech-12 Bt was banned for cultivation in the entire south of India.

"The dangers of GE organisms in the food chain and the environment are becoming apparent. All government agencies and commercial interests must take these warnings seriously before it is too late", says Ms Bleakley.

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