



agriculture, forestry & fisheries

Department:
Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

MEDIA STATEMENT FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY AND FISHERIES ON THE SO-CALLED AGENT ORANGE MAIZE

For Immediate Release

PRETORIA

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The Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) wishes to confirm that an application for commodity clearance of genetically modified (GM) maize – DAS-40278-9 – from Dow Agro sciences, dubbed in the media as “Agent Orange Maize”, was approved in May 2012.

This GM maize has been modified to be resistant to the herbicide 2,4-dichlorophenoxyacetic acid (commonly referred to as 2,4-D). This trait is achieved through the expression of a protein (enzyme) in the maize which degrades 2,4-D into herbicidally-inactive 2,4-dichlorophenol (DCP). This means that in the production of GM maize, a herbicide spraying regime may be applied which will not affect GM maize.

Recent print media reports have labelled this GM maize “*Agent Orange Maize*” in reference to the apparent use of 2,4-D as a chemical weapon in the Vietnam War. These articles further express the reported dangers associated with 2,4-D.

Two separate, though related, issues should be considered: the safety of GM maize and the safety of the agricultural remedy being applied.

The safety of GM maize was assessed as prescribed under the Genetically Modified Organisms Act, 1997 (Act No. 15 of 1997). The process included a review by a scientific panel and the ultimate decision by the intergovernmental decision-making body, the Executive Council. The decision was informed by the safety assessments of the introduced trait (the enzyme which degrades 2,4-D) and the safety of the derived food and feeds. Given the various categories of activities regulated by the GMO Act, this specific approval was restricted to use of GM maize as food and feed and not for general planting. Despite this approval, no imports of the specific maize have taken place yet.

All activities involving GMOs in field trials, use as food and feed or full commercialisation must also be published for the information and inputs of the general public. For the application under discussion, public notifications of the intended activity were placed in the

Sunday Times, City Press and Rapport newspapers on 4 March 2012. Copies of these notices are available upon request.

As in many other countries, the use of 2,4-D is legally allowed in SA. It is important to note that South Africa has set up a Maximum Residue Levels (MRLs) of 0,5 mg/kg for 2,4-D in maize in terms of the Foodstuffs, Cosmetics and Disinfectants Act, 1972 (Act No. 54 of 1972).

The MRL applies to both the conventional maize and the 2,4-D tolerant GM maize. Should the current approved MRL of 0,5 mg/kg be exceeded due to increased use of the herbicide on the tolerant GM maize, the risk associated with the use of 2,4-D on imported maize will be re-evaluated.

Currently, there is no scientific evidence to suggest that the current MRL of 0,5 mg/kg will be exceeded and thus putting the South African consumers at risk. However, both the Departments of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and Health will continue to jointly address the issue of confirming local MRLs for, among others, 2,4-D, as well as implementing measures to monitor the MRLs of maize consignments from countries where this maize is produced, when imported into this country for purposes of foodstuffs intended for human consumption.

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