Overview of ICCR work on Genetically Engineered Seeds/Foods

ICCR began work on the issue of genetically engineered seeds and food in the fall of 1999. The context was the exponential growth of the planting of GE-crops (particularly corn, soybeans, cotton, and canola) under a weak regulatory system, with no long-term studies on health or environmental effects, and awareness of growing international opposition to these products. ICCR shareholders concerns have been threefold:

1. **Potential health effects**, particularly unknown allergenic effects;
2. **Environmental impacts** (creation of noxious weeds thru gene flow, infiltration to native species, insect resistance, pollution of organic crops); and
3. **Corporate power** over local and indigenous growers due to the patented genes of the genetically engineered seed.

These concerns remain today.

From the beginning of this work, ICCR's strategy was to approach the entire spectrum of food companies, from seed to processor to grocer to distributor to restaurant. It soon became evident that most of the food industry, except for the seed companies, had really paid little attention to the issue and were depending upon the word of the biotech industry and of the regulatory agencies. Three agencies have various responsibilities for oversight: the USDA, EPA and FDA. This is called the "coordinated framework."

The first resolutions asked for a moratorium on using GE-products or labeling. Most companies challenged the resolution at the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). In an important success for shareholders, the SEC staff ruled that the issue of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) is not ordinary business but a significant social issue. The SEC has continued to support these resolutions, albeit with some changes in language with specific companies.

After two years of struggling to get needed votes, and in many cases not succeeding, the Resolved clause was changed to ask for a Report on Impacts, or Labeling. CALPERS, the nation's largest public pension fund, has voted in support of the Report on Impacts. **The highest vote was 17.6% support for Labeling GMOs, at Wendy's in 2006.**

<u>Major developments along the way</u>:

- Five National Academy of Sciences reports indicate weaknesses in the US regulatory systems, either gaps regarding possible allergens or environmental impacts. Much of the regulatory system is voluntary, not

mandatory. There is no monitoring system to detect unanticipated effects on health or environment.

- In the EU, many major supermarket chains refuse to sell GMO foods, and labeling is required for all products containing over 0.9% GMOs.
- StarLink, a GE-corn approved only for animal feed, was found in taco shells in the fall of 2000. This caused recalls of products costing millions of dollars. The FDA/EPA then indicated that no GE-crop would be approved if it did not meet standards for human food . StarLink continues to be found sporadically in shipments of corn.
- In the fall of 2001, GE-corn was found in Oaxaca, Mexico. It is illegal to plant GE-corn in Mexico but not to import it. This finding heightened the debate about impact on Centers of Origin. In 2003, it was reported that GE-corn was found in 9 states of Mexico, but in 2005 Oaxaca was reported as GE-free. Regulations in Mexico are not finalized. Dow, DuPont and Monsanto all had field trials in northern Mexico which had to be terminated.
- PepsiCo requested its corn growers not to use GM-corn. McDonald's does not use GE-potatoes, nor does McCain's. Heinz has a policy of "seeking to avoid GMOs." Campbell's Soup Co. does not use GE- tomatoes even though the company helped to develop the Flavr-Savr tomato (a GMO). JM Smucker publicly supports the position of not engineering food crops to produce pharmaceuticals. **Hain developed a brochure to clarify the company's position of not using GMOs.**
- Dow established its "Guiding Principles for Biotechnology" after almost 2 years of dialogue with shareholders, and will not use food crops for plant-based pharmaceuticals
- In 2002, the US used food aid to pressure recipient nations to accept GE-food without milling or independent safety studies. The debate about impacts of GE food aid on undernourished hungry peoples continues, as does debate about claims that GMOs are an essential solution to the problem of hunger.
- Food crops are also being engineered to produce pharmaceutical or industrial chemicals. In the fall of 2002, in Iowa and Nebraska field tests of these crops resulted in contamination of a cornfield and an elevator of soybeans. Nothing reached the food stream. After that, the Grocery Manufacturers Association and the National Food Processors Association called for "zero tolerance" of Plant Made Pharmaceuticals (PMP) or Plant Made Industrial Products (PMIPs) in the food system. The USDA strengthened its requirements for field trials, but open planting is taking place. The concern about using major food crops for this purpose is very high.
- In the Fall 2003, Monsanto, the largest producer of GMOs and of PMPs announces that it is leaving the cereal business in the UK and other countries of the EU, and that it is discontinuing its work on PMPs.

- Use of herbicide resistant crops is resulting increased weediness. Globally, eleven weeds have been identified as resistant to glyphosate, potentially impacting weed management.
- In 2006, it was reported that illegal Liberty Link Rice was planted in the US and the subsequent contamination has has disrupted US rice exports The EU requires testing of all US rice imports at a cost to the importers.
- August 14, 2006, Federal District Court ruled that USDA's permitting of drug-producing genetically engineered crops in Hawaii violated the Endangered Species Act and the National Environmental Policy Act
- ICCR continues to advocate for labeling of GMO as a way to protect consumer right to know. Labeling also indicates that companies are prepared to remove any product should circumstances require.
- 6/28/06 The global alliance Action by Churches Together took a stand in support of "right to know" whether there are genetically engineered ingredients in the food purchased or seeds sown, and endorsed a precautionary approach.

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