



Attention:
Geneviève Paradis
Sustainability Specialist
Sobeys Inc.

December 14, 2020

RE: Responding to your statements on GMOs, Transparency Questionnaire

Dear Sobeys,

In response to our transparency questionnaire on genetically modified organisms (GMOs) asking if Sobeys was selling, or planned to sell, GM salmon, GM apples, GM potatoes and GM sweetcorn, you provided the answer:

“We are aligned with the position of the Retail Council of Canada, which is that:

- Studies over the past two decades continue to confirm that genetically modified (GM) foods are as safe and nutritious as conventionally produced food.
- Genetically modified crops bring many benefits to growers and consumers alike – with pest resistance, reduced pesticide use, healthy oils and trans fat replacement among them.”

Since Sobeys is providing statements about the safety and benefits of GM foods, we would like to provide some corrections to this information and further context.

“Studies over the past two decades continue to confirm that genetically modified (GM) foods are as safe and nutritious as conventionally produced food.”

There are studies in the scientific literature that indicate the safety of certain genetically modified (GM or genetically engineered) foods and there are studies that indicate potential problems with certain GM foods.¹ These studies do not provide confirmation of the overall safety of genetically modified foods for human consumption. There is no consensus on the safety of genetically modified foods.²

Health Canada has approved many GM foods after determining that these particular GM foods are as safe and nutritious as conventionally produced food. Government safety assessments are required on a case-by-case basis because each GMO is different and could present unique risks.

“Genetically modified crops bring many benefits to growers and consumers alike – with pest resistance, reduced pesticide use, healthy oils and trans fat replacement among them.”

Currently, 100% of the GM crops currently grown in Canada are herbicide tolerant, some are also insect resistant. GM crops with altered oil profiles are not yet on the market in Canada, though they may be coming soon.

Pest resistance:

Pest resistance is the second most widely used GM trait in Canada and around the world, after herbicide-tolerance.³ However, certain insect pests are now developing resistance to some of the GM (Bt) toxins in insect-resistant plants.⁴ This means that, over time, some or all of these GM traits will become useless for pest control.

Reduced pesticide use:

The term pesticides normally refers to insecticides, herbicides and fungicides.

The federal government does not monitor pesticide use, and it does not track which GM crops are commercialized, how much or where GM crops are grown, or how they change pesticide use.

- The use of GM insect-resistant (Bt) crops in the US has decreased the use of insecticides.⁵ However, **the GM technology transforms the crop plant itself into a pesticide**, arguably changing the form of the pesticide rather than replacing it. If the expression of the Bt toxin itself is quantified, GM insect resistant crops do not decrease the insecticide load.⁶
- 100% of the GM crops currently grown in Canada have herbicide-tolerant traits, including all of the GM insect-resistant crops (corn).⁷ While GM herbicide-tolerant crops initially reduced the use of herbicides in the US, this trend began to reverse as early as 2002.⁸ Weeds that are resistant to herbicides continue to evolve and spread with the use of herbicides (in this case, glyphosate in particular) on GM herbicide-tolerant crops,⁹ leading companies to commercialize GM crops that are tolerant to multiple herbicides, including 2,4-D and/or dicamba.¹⁰ **Herbicide sales have increased in Canada by 243% since the introduction of GM crops (1994-2017).**¹¹

Healthy oils:

In July 2020, Health Canada and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency approved a canola from the company Nuseed that is genetically engineered to have a modified fatty acid profile (and to be tolerant to the herbicide glufosinate ammonium). The canola has been genetically engineered to produce omega-3 fatty acids that are not otherwise present in canola seed. **This is the first GM crop approved with a “healthier oil” profile but the seeds are not yet sold in Canada and it is not yet on the market for consumers.**

Trans fat replacement:

The company Calyxt has genetically engineered a soybean to have high oleic oil content as an alternative to commodity soybean oils that contain trans fat. **This soybean is not yet approved in Canada for growing or eating, but was grown in the US starting in 2019.**

Please let us know if you have questions or require more information. We are pleased to discuss these issues and this information at any time.

Thank you for your continued attention to this important issue,

Sincerely,



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¹ Canadian Biotechnology Action Network, Are GM Foods Better for Consumers? 2015
www.gmo inquiry.ca/consumers

² European Network of Scientists for Social and Environmental Responsibility, Statement: No scientific consensus on GMO safety, October 21, 2013.

³ ISAAA. 2020. Global Status of Commercialized Biotech/GM Crops in 2019: Biotech Crops Drive Socio-Economic Development and Sustainable Environment in the New Frontier. ISAAA Brief No. 55. ISAAA: Ithaca, NY.

⁴ Tracey Baute, European Corn Borer Resistance to Bt Corn Found in Canada, May 10, 2019.

⁵ Benbrook C. Impacts of genetically engineered crops on pesticide use in the US – The first sixteen years. *Environ Sci Eur.* 2012;24.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Field Crop News, Bt Corn Products Available as of April 2020. Accessed November 30, 2020.

⁸ Benbrook C. Impacts of genetically engineered crops on pesticide use in the US – The first sixteen years. *Environ Sci Eur.* 2012;24.

⁹ Canadian Biotechnology Action Network, Are GM Crops Better for the Environment? 2015
www.gmo inquiry.ca/environment

¹⁰ Canadian Biotechnology Action Network, <https://cban.ca/gmos/issues/pesticides/24-d-and-dicamba-tolerant-crops>

¹¹ Canadian Biotechnology Action Network, Factsheet: Genetically Modified Crops and Herbicides, December 2020. <https://cban.ca/wp-content/uploads/Genetically-Modified-Crops-and-Herbicides-Dec-2020.pdf>