

Protesters hit out at 'engineered' food

Seed giant Monsanto should be stopped from "forcing" genetically modified products on South African consumers, say protesters, while the company defends its products as "thoroughly reviewed" and safe.



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Hundreds of activists and lobbyists turned out for the protest at the company's head office in Fourways, Johannesburg, on Saturday, 25 May 2013.

The protest coincided with marches against genetically modified organisms (GMO) and genetically modified food in the United States and other countries.

Genetically modified seeds are engineered to resist pests and herbicides or harsh environmental conditions.

Mariam Mayet, one of the organisers of the march and director of the African Centre for Biosafety, said the aim was to stop Monsanto from forcing GMO products on South African consumers.

"South African maize is now modified. According to recent official reports, more than 80% of white maize and as much as 93% of yellow maize is genetically modified," she said.

If genetically modified food were suitable for human consumption, why had countries such as Germany, Japan, New Zealand, Hungary, Bulgaria and Russia banned GMO, Mayet wanted to know.

"Recent studies have shown that GMO may cause cancer. Unfortunately, many South Africans still don't realise they are being sold unnatural, experimental, risky substances as part of their daily diet," she said.

Dr Christopher Bester, a scientist, said: "GMO is a real problem because they can't contain the genetic modification.

"If I farm next to somebody using GMO seeds, my maize would be contaminated without even modifying it.

"Monsanto have modified 20 crops already and they want to convert more. We are being taken over by an American company because we are not capable to see that they are killing us."

Philiswe Dzanibe, one of the protesters, said since she became aware of the dangers of eating food that contains GMO last year, she had stopped eating pap because it contained GMO. "Now I am careful. I read the labelling before buying because I don't want to die young. I just wish we can take the awareness to the townships where people consume pap, unaware that it is dangerous."

The director of Monsanto in Africa, Kobus Lindeque, said Monsanto took the safety of its products seriously. "Our genetically modified seeds and herbicides are thoroughly reviewed by public health and regulatory authorities."

Source: Sowetan

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