Minister of Health | Ministre de la Santé

Ottawa, Canada K1A 0K9

JAN 27 2011

Ms. Maureen Carter-Whitney
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Canadian Institute for Environmental
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The Reverend Dr. Karen Hamilton
General Secretary
The Canadian Council of Churches
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Toronto, Ontario M5S 2C3

Dear Ms. Carter-Whitney and Dr. Hamilton:

This is in response to your environmental petition no. 305 of September 7, 2010, addressed to the Mr. Scott Vaughan, Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development (CESD).

In your petition you raised concerns about the labelling of genetically modified organisms.

I am pleased to provide you with the enclosed Health Canada joint response to question four. This response was prepared in collaboration with the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency which falls under his portfolio, and the Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada. The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board will respond separately to questions one, two, and three, which also reflect input from Health Canada.

I appreciate your interest in this important matter, and I hope that you will find this information useful.

Sincerely,

Leona Aglukkaq

Enclosure

c.c. Mr. Scott Vaughan, CESD
The Honourable Gerry Ritz, P.C., M.P.
The Honourable Rona Ambrose, P.C., M.P.

Canada

Appendix A

Response of Health Canada
Environmental Petition No. 305 Filed by Ms. Maureen Carter-Whitney and The Reverend Dr. Karen Hamilton under the *Auditor General Act*

Received October 4, 2010

Concerns: Accountability for Labelling of Genetically Modified Organisms

January 29, 2011

Minister of Health

Question # 4:

What circumstances would be needed for Health Canada, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, or any other responsible departments to implement mandatory labelling for GMOs?

Response:

Health Canada's mandate is to assess whether novel foods, including those derived from biotechnology, are safe prior to entering the Canadian food supply. To this end the *Food and Drug Regulations* ("Regulations") provide for a pre-market notification process which requires that the safety of a novel food be assessed before it can be sold in Canada. Novel foods can be sold in Canada only if they meet the applicable requirements of the *Food and Drugs Act* and the Regulations.

The safety assessment undertaken is conducted according to Health Canada's Guidelines for the Safety Assessment of Novel Foods (http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/legislation/guide-ld/nf-an/guidelines-lignesdirectrices-eng.php). These Guidelines are based upon scientific principles developed through expert international consultation over the last ten years with agencies such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The approach to the safety assessment of biotechnology-derived foods taken by Canada is currently applied by regulatory agencies around the world in countries such as the European Union member states, Australia/New Zealand, Japan, and the United States.

Health Canada and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) share the responsibility for food labelling policies under the *Food and Drugs Act*. Health Canada is responsible for developing policy and setting standards related to the health and safety aspects of labelling under the *Food and Drugs Act* and its Regulations, whereas the CFIA applies these policies and enforces the regulations. The CFIA also has the mandate to develop general food labelling policies and regulations not related to health and safety, such as how the food was produced. In particular, the CFIA is responsible for protecting consumers from misrepresentation and fraud with respect to food labelling, packaging and advertising, and for prescribing basic food labelling and advertising requirements.

Ultimately, food products derived from genetic modification that are demonstrated to be safe and nutritious, are held to the same safety standards as non-genetically modified foods and treated the same as non-genetically modified foods with regard to labelling requirements. This includes requirements for special labelling if changes occurred in the food that the consumer needs to be informed of for health and safety reasons, such as major compositional or nutritional changes.