

# GM Food Newsletter

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## An Unexpected Visitor

In a country far away, there was a corn family living in a farm. One day, an unexpected visitor came and knocked on the door ....

.... knock knock .... knock knock ....  
"Please wait .... I am coming ...."

Corn: Hello .... Hmm .... have we met before?



**GM Corn Seed :** Hello. I am GM corn seed. My family has just moved into the farm next to here and will be planted in that farm. I am now visiting the nearby farms to say hello to my new neighbours.

**Corn :** Welcome, welcome. Nice to meet you... wait... you said your family has just moved into the farm NEXT to us?

**GM Corn Seed :** Yes, you are right. You seemed to be shocked? Is there anything wrong with my new home?

**Corn :** Ohhh... it seems that you really don't know. Let me tell you, that farm is un-liveable and you better leave there immediately!

**GM Corn Seed :** Why? The living environment of the farm is very good. There is adequate sunlight and the air is fresh. Most importantly, we love the soil there, which seemed to be very fertile.

**Corn :** Of course. But do you know how the corns live around here call that farm? "The Buggy Farm" !!! That farm has been abandoned for many years because it was full of pests. As a matter of fact, the farms around here spent a lot of money to buy pesticides to kill those pests which escaped from "The Buggy Farm". Therefore, for the benefit of you and your family, you should leave that farm as soon as possible.

**GM Corn Seed :** Thank you very much for your advice. But we know the farm was full of pests before making the decision to move in. In fact, we are not afraid of those pests at all because my family has been genetically modified (GM) to increase our resistance towards those harmful pests.

**Corn :** Really? In this case, your family may be able to live there then.

**GM Corn Seed :** Yes. Indeed, we are specifically developed to live in areas with serious pest problems.

**Corn :** It seems that you can survive in a harsh environment. I remember hearing about you.

**GM Corn Seed :** Really?

**Corn :** Yes, but.... I have heard many rumours about your GM family too. Will you be safe for eating? For example, some organisations claimed that you will cause serious health problems and is not suitable for human consumption. Some media reports even cautioned that you will induce allergic reactions. Are they real? Will you induce allergic reaction after consumption?



**GM Corn Seed :** Ha ha ha ... these are only myths and rumours. In fact, we have undergone thorough examination and check-up before we are allowed to be put on the market. Only when the authority is fully satisfied that we are safe for human consumption, are we allowed to produce our sons and daughters in the open field. The examination was really extensive. They examined my...

**Corn :** So, how about the problem of allergenicity? Will people get rash and itch after eating you?

**GM Corn Seed :** OK, let me cut my long story short. Actually, the allergenicity assessment is an important component of the GM food examination. The authority is fully satisfied that I am not allergenic before allowing me to be put on sale. Have you heard of WHO?

**Corn :** Certainly, the international health organization.

**GM Corn Seed :** Besides me, the World Health Organization (WHO) also stated that no allergic effect has been found in other GM foods currently on sale in the international market.

**Corn :** Although the allergenicity of GM food will be assessed before approving for sale, how can I know the assessment really works?

**GM Corn Seed :** Hmm... let me give you an example. In 1996, the researcher tried to improve the nutritional value of soya bean by transferring a Brazil-nut protein to the soya bean. However, this new variety of soya bean was found to be allergenic during the pre-market safety assessment. The whole project was terminated and the allergenic GM soya bean was never commercialised. This example illustrates the effectiveness of the pre-market safety assessment in ensuring the food safety of GM food and protecting the public health.



**Corn :** So, can I say that GM food is not more allergenic than the conventional food?

**GM Corn Seed :** Exactly. In fact, allergies do occur in many conventional foods, like seafood and peanuts. Moreover, while traditionally developed foods are not generally tested for allergenicity, the allergenicity of GM food has been extensively assessed.

**Corn :** Okay, I have no worries about the food safety of GM food now. Are you and your family available this Saturday? Maybe we can arrange a welcome party ... of course, not in your "buggy home"...

## News

### Release of Guidelines on Voluntary Labelling of Genetically Modified (GM) Food

In July 2006, the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) has issued a set of guidelines for labelling of GM food to enhance consumers' knowledge and right to make an informed choice on GM food. The guidelines set out the principles underlying the recommended labelling approaches for GM food and provide reference for the trade to make truthful claims and informative labels in a consumer-friendly manner. Although the guidelines are advisory in nature and have no legal effect, the trade are encouraged to adopt these guidelines to standardise the information for the consumers.

The guidelines as well as a set of Frequent Asked Questions are available from the department's webpage ([www.fehd.gov.hk](http://www.fehd.gov.hk)).

For more information on GM food, please visit our website

[www.fehd.gov.hk/safefood/gmf/index1.html](http://www.fehd.gov.hk/safefood/gmf/index1.html)