



FINAL RISK ANALYSIS REPORT

APPLICATION A384

Food derived from insect and potato virus Y-protected potato lines RBMT15-101, SEMT15-02 and SEMT15-15

Note:

This report is the “Inquiry” as referred to in Section 16 of the *Australia New Zealand Food Authority Act (1991)* and sets out the reasons for making a recommendation to the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Council under Section 18 of the Act.

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INTRODUCTION

An application was received from Monsanto Australia Ltd on 30 April 1999 for the approval of food from genetically modified (GM) potato lines RBMT15-101, SEMT15-02 and SEMT15-15 under Standard A18 – food produced using gene technology. The potatoes have been genetically modified to provide protection against a range of insects, including the Colorado potato beetle (CPB), as well as against potato virus Y (PVY). The potatoes are known commercially as New Leaf® Y potatoes.

CONCLUSIONS

The Australia New Zealand Food Authority (ANZFA) conducted a comprehensive assessment of the application according to its *Guidelines for the safety assessment of foods to be included in Standard A18 – food produced using gene technology*. These guidelines are based upon internationally accepted principles for establishing the safety of foods derived from genetically modified organisms.

On the basis of the data submitted with the application and evidence obtained from the scientific literature it is concluded that:

- the introduced genes in New Leaf® Y potato lines RBMT15-101, SEMT15-02 and SEMT15-15 are not considered to produce any additional public health and safety risk;
- based on the data submitted in the present application, food from New Leaf® Y potato lines RBMT15-101, SEMT15-02 and SEMT15-15 is equivalent to food from other commercial varieties of potatoes in terms of their safety and nutritional adequacy.

RECOMMENDATION

On the basis of the available evidence, ANZFA considers that food derived from New Leaf® Y potatoes is as safe for human consumption as food from other commercial potato varieties and therefore recommends that the Australian *Food Standards Code* (Volume 1) and the recently approved joint *Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code* (Volume 2) be amended to give approval for the sale of such food in Australia and New Zealand. The proposed variation to Standard A18 and Standard 1.5.2 is provided in Attachment 1.

Full details of ANZFA's assessment of the application are provided in the following report.

BACKGROUND TO THE APPLICATION

The New Leaf® Y potatoes are protected against CPB and PVY through the transfer of two genes — the *cry3Aa* gene from the soil bacterium *Bacillus thuringiensis* subspecies *tenebrionis* and the *PVYcp* gene from PVY. The potatoes are not grown in Australia or New Zealand and are currently not permitted to be imported into Australia and New Zealand as fresh produce. Rather, the principle food products containing these potato varieties are likely to be imported processed food commodities such as processed potato crisps, pre-cooked French fries, potato flour and potato starch.

Direct benefits from the New Leaf® Y potatoes are likely to accrue mainly to the primary producer who will be able to substantially reduce costs for controlling CPB and PVY by reducing reliance on the use of agricultural chemicals. More general benefits, however, may also flow to the community as a result of reduced primary production costs.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

ANZFA completed a Notice of Application (formally referred to as the Preliminary ANZFA completed a Notice of Application (formally referred to as the Preliminary Assessment Report) upon receipt of the application and called for public comment on 3 November 1999. A total of 45 submissions were subsequently received. Attachment 5 contains a summary of the first round public comment.

ANZFA then conducted an assessment of the application, including a safety evaluation of the food, taking into account the comments received. A draft risk analysis report was released for public comment on 30 August 2000. A total of 17 submissions were subsequently received in response to the release of this report. A summary of the second round public comment is also provided in Attachment 5.

NOTIFICATION OF THE WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

During the ANZFA assessment process, comments are also sought internationally from other Members of the World Trade Organization (WTO). As Members of the WTO, Australia and New Zealand are signatories to the agreements on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS Agreement) and on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT Agreements) (for further details on WTO, see Attachment 4). In some circumstances, Australia and New Zealand have an obligation to notify the WTO of changes to food standards to enable other member countries of the WTO to make comment.

As there is significant international interest in the safety of these foods, the proposed changes to Standard A18 are considered to raise potential Technical Barrier to Trade or Sanitary/Phytosanitary matters and were therefore notified to the WTO.

ISSUES ADDRESSED DURING ASSESSMENT

1. Safety assessment (Attachment 2)

The safety assessment was performed according to the safety assessment guidelines prepared by ANZFA¹ and considered the following issues: (1) the nature of the genetic modification; (2) general safety issues such as novel protein expression and the potential for transfer of novel genetic material to cells in the human digestive tract; (3) toxicological issues; and (4) nutritional issues.

¹ ANZFA (1999) Guidelines for the safety assessment of foods to be included in Standard A18 – food produced using gene technology.

Nature of the genetic modification

Four genes were stably transferred to the New Leaf® Y potatoes – *cry3Aa*, *PVYcp*, *nptII*, and *aad*. The *cry3Aa* and *PVYcp* genes are responsible for the insect and virus protection traits, whereas the other two genes were used as marker genes only.

The *cry3Aa* gene produces a protein, called Cry3Aa, which is selectively active against a narrow range of beetles, including CPB. When ingested, Cry3Aa binds to cells lining the insect gut causing their rupture and leading to gut paralysis and the eventual death of the insect. Cry3Aa does not have any ability to bind to mammalian intestinal cells. The *PVYcp* gene produces a protein that forms a protective coat around the genome of the virus. When this gene is expressed in a plant prior to viral infection it has been found to have a protective effect. The exact mechanism by which this viral protection occurs is unknown.

The *nptII* gene encodes the enzyme neomycin phosphotransferase II (NPTII) and confers resistance to the antibiotics neomycin, kanamycin, and geneticin (G418). The *aad* gene encodes the enzyme streptomycin adenylyltransferase and confers resistance to the antibiotics spectinomycin and streptomycin.

General safety issues

The potato (*Solanum tuberosum* L.) is a major food crop throughout the world and has a long history of safe use as human food. The main food products to be derived from the New Leaf® Plus potatoes will be processed food commodities such as processed potato crisps, pre-cooked French fries, potato flour and potato starch.

The New Leaf® Y potatoes produce three novel proteins — Cry3Aa, the PVY coat protein and NPTII. The *aad* gene is not produced in the potatoes. The Cry3Aa protein is expressed in tubers at levels up to 0.0019 % of total tuber protein and NPTII is expressed at levels equivalent to <0.001% of the total tuber protein. The PVY coat protein could not be detected in the plants.

The impact on human health from the potential transfer of novel genetic material to cells in the human digestive tract was considered. The presence of novel genetic material, including two antibiotic resistance genes, in the New Leaf® Y potatoes is not considered to pose any additional safety concerns.

Toxicological issues

The only naturally-occurring toxins in potatoes are the glycoalkaloids. The glycoalkaloid levels in the New Leaf® Y potatoes are within the literature reported ranges for commercial potato varieties.

Acute oral toxicity testing of Cry3Aa and NPTII proteins in mice demonstrated that both proteins are non-toxic to mammals, including humans. In addition, it is well known from the literature that Cry3Aa is toxic only to a narrow range of beetles and is non-toxic to mammals, including humans. These two proteins are also considered to have very limited potential to become food allergens because they do not possess any of the physical characteristics common to allergens, have any significant similarity to known allergens, are not present at high levels in potato tubers and both readily degraded in conditions that mimic mammalian digestion.

The PVY coat protein is known to be non-toxic to humans from the long history of human exposure to this protein through the consumption of PVY-infected potatoes. As this protein can also not be detected in the potatoes it also has very limited potential to become a food allergen.

Nutritional issues

Detailed compositional analyses were done to establish the nutritional adequacy of the New Leaf® Y potatoes. Constituents analysed were total solids, sugars, soluble protein, proximate (total protein, fat, crude fibre, ash, total carbohydrates and calories), amino acid, vitamin and mineral content. These analyses confirmed that the New Leaf® Y potatoes are compositionally equivalent to other commercial potato varieties in terms of these constituents.

Conclusion

Based on the data submitted in the present application, food from the New Leaf® Y potatoes is equivalent to food from other commercially available potato cultivars in terms of its safety and nutritional adequacy.

2. Labelling of food derived from insect and PVY-protected potatoes

Clause 3 of Standard A18 prescribes mandatory labelling of a food produced using gene technology when it contains new or altered genetic material and where it is not substantially equivalent in any characteristic or property of the food. As food from the New Leaf® Y potatoes has been found to be equivalent to food from other commercial varieties of potatoes there is no requirement for mandatory labelling under the current standard.

It should be noted that under an amendment to Standard A18 agreed to by the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Council on 28 July 2000, and finalised on 24 November 2000, GM food will require labelling where novel DNA and/or protein is present in the final food and also where the food has altered characteristics. This requirement will come into effect 12 months after the date of gazettal.

3. Issues arising from public submissions

3.1 General issues

Many of the submissions received in both the first and second rounds of public comment raised issues of a general nature relating to gene technology or issues that had already been addressed in the safety assessment report (see Attachment 2). A discussion of some of the more general issues raised in public submissions can be found in Attachment 6.

3.2 Specific issues

This section of the report will only address those issues raised in public submissions that are specific to an assessment of this application.

Issues raised in first round of public comment (see Attachment 5 for summary)

(i) Use of Bt toxins

Mr A. Ward and the Health Department of Western Australia raised concerns about the effect of *Bt* toxin on humans. The New Zealand Ministry of Health stated that ANZFA's assessment report should explain the biochemistry of the *Bt* protein and why it is unlikely to cause any harmful effects when consumed by humans.

Response

The *Bt* toxins are a related group of proteins produced by different types of *B. thuringiensis* during sporulation. The *Bt* toxin being used in the New Leaf® Y potatoes is known as Cry3Aa. Cry3Aa has been shown to be selectively active against a narrow spectrum of beetles, such as CPB.

The mode of action of the *Bt* toxin is reviewed in the draft safety assessment report and its potential toxicity to mammals is also addressed (Attachment 2). It was concluded that Cry3Aa is non-toxic to mammals, including humans. This conclusion is based on a number of different pieces of evidence.

Firstly, direct experimental evidence on the absence of toxicity in mice was provided. Doses of up to 5000 mg protein/kg body weight were used and showed no adverse effects. This dose has been calculated to be at least 3 million times higher than estimated dietary intakes.

Secondly, the mode of action of the *Bt* toxins has been thoroughly studied. When ingested by susceptible insect species, *Bt* toxins cause lysis of midgut epithelial cells in the insect gut, which leads to gut paralysis, cessation of feeding and the eventual death of the insect. The binding of the toxin to the insect gut is essential for the onset of toxicity. Binding is mediated through specialised receptors on the cell surface. If the receptors are not present on the cell surface, the toxin will not bind and will not be able to exert its toxic effect. This is why certain types of *Bt* toxins can be toxic to some insects and not others e.g., why Cry3Aa is toxic to some types of beetles, but not toxic to moths and butterflies. The *Bt* toxins also have not shown any ability to be able to bind to mammalian gut tissue. It can therefore be inferred from the results of these studies that the *Bt* toxins are highly unlikely to exert any toxic effects in mammals, including humans, because the cells lining the human gut lack the receptors necessary for the binding of the toxin.

Lastly, microbial preparations containing Cry3Aa have been in commercial use as an insecticide on crops such as eggplant, potatoes and tomatoes in the United States since 1989 with no reports of any adverse effects in humans.

(ii) Estimation of dietary intakes of novel proteins

The New Zealand Ministry of Health submitted that the insect and virus-protected potatoes are likely to be a highly consumed foodstuff and suggested that the dietary intakes of the *Bt* and viral protein present in the potatoes should be estimated.

Response

When food substances are known to be hazardous, an estimate is made of the dietary intake to determine the likely human exposure to the hazard. If exposure is likely to be low there may be less cause for concern than if exposure is likely to be high.

The *Bt* protein and PVY coat protein are not considered hazardous, that is, they are non-toxic to mammals, including humans. Because of the absence of any hazard, an estimate of the dietary intake of both proteins was not considered essential for the safety assessment. However, it is recognised that such information may be useful in providing reassurance to the community that exposure to a novel protein is low and/or that the novel protein is likely to be present in the diet at levels well below those found to be safe in animal toxicity studies.

Cry3Aa is expressed in the New Leaf® Y potato tubers at levels ranging from 0.08 to 0.38 µg protein/g fresh weight. If certain assumptions are made about market penetration of the New Leaf® Y potato products, it is possible to estimate a dietary intake for the *Bt* protein.

In the case of the PVY coat protein an estimate of dietary intake is not possible as the protein cannot be detected in the New Leaf® Y potato plants. As the PVY coat protein cannot be detected in the potatoes, it follows that dietary exposure to this protein, from the consumption of New Leaf® Y potatoes, will be low and certainly much less than that estimated for Cry3Aa.

Australian and New Zealand consumption data is available for crisps, instant mashed potato and commercial potato fries but is not currently available for potato flour or potato starch. Excluding potato flour and starch, the average total consumption² of processed potato products per person is 19.4 g/day in Australia, and 21.5 g/day in New Zealand. If, however, the consumption figures are based only on those in the population who report consuming potatoes then the average total consumption is 118.2 g/day and the 95th percentile consumption is 300 g/day.

For calculation of the dietary intake of the novel proteins, the highest potato consumption figure (300 g/day) and the highest protein concentration (0.38 µg protein/g fresh weight) was used. This represents a ‘worst-case’ estimate.

To do the calculation, assumptions about the proportion of processed potato products derived from the New Leaf® Y potatoes must be made. Data on market penetration of the New Leaf® Y potatoes is not available. In the absence of information about market penetration, two estimates were made — one using a very worst case estimate where it is assumed that all potato products are derived entirely from New Leaf® Y potatoes and the other, probably more realistic estimate, where it is assumed that 10% of potato products are derived from New Leaf® Y potatoes. The dietary intake estimates are provided in the table below:

² Calculated for all respondents

Theoretical Market penetration	Estimated dietary intake	
	µg /day	µg/kg BW/day ¹
100 %	114	1.75
10 %	11.4	0.175

¹ assuming a body weight of 65 kg.

The very worst-case estimate is at least 3 million times less than the dose found to have no adverse effects in mice (5220 mg Cry3Aa/kg BW). Therefore, even if all processed potato products were to be derived from the New Leaf® Y potatoes, a very large margin of safety exists.

The potato consumption data and estimated dietary intakes of the novel proteins are included with the draft safety assessment report (Attachment 2).

Issues raised in second round of public comment (see Attachment 5 for summary)

(i) Use of a synthetic gene to produce the Bt protein

Dr Kate Clinch-Jones stated in her submission that the Bt protein used in the potatoes (Cry3Aa) is not identical to the conventional form and that, despite this knowledge, ANZFA has been happy to extrapolate toxicity data from the conventional form, with no confirmatory testing.

Response

These issues have been fully addressed in the safety assessment report (Attachment 2) and were also addressed as part of a consideration of the first round public submissions.

The Bt gene used in the potatoes, originally derived from a soil bacterium, had been completely re-synthesised to facilitate the production of higher levels of the Bt protein in plant cells. This was required because it has been found that many bacterial genes are poorly expressed in plant cells, meaning that they do not produce high levels of protein. This is attributed to the fact that bacteria have different codon preferences to that of plants. Codons are sets of three adjacent nucleotides in DNA that code for specific amino acids. More than one codon can specify the same amino acids, e.g., four different codons can be used to specify the amino acid alanine. It has been shown that if the bacteria-preferred codons are substituted with plant-preferred codons the expression of bacterial genes in plants can be markedly improved.

The re-synthesis of the Bt gene used in the potatoes resulted in a total of 399 out of 1791 nucleotides being changed. However, this change in the nucleotide sequence of the gene was achieved without altering the amino acid sequence of the expressed protein. Therefore the re-synthesised Bt gene expresses a Bt protein (Cry3Aa) that is identical to that produced in nature by soil bacterium.

Therefore, while the nucleotide sequence of the Bt gene transferred to the potatoes differs to that of the “native” gene in the soil bacterium, this difference does not result in any changes to the amino acid sequence of the encoded protein. Moreover, an acute toxicity study of the Bt protein, which was evaluated as part of ANZFA’s safety assessment, had been done using protein produced from the re-synthesised gene. Therefore the conclusions of the study are directly applicable to the food as consumed.

(ii) *Toxicity testing of Cry3Aa and NPTII*

Dr Kate Clinch-Jones stated in her submission that no long term toxicity testing was done with the novel proteins (Cry3Aa and NPTII), and that not all toxins have acute effects and that some can go on to cause cancer. The New Zealand Ministry of Health stated in their submission that an investigation of the combined chronic toxicity/carcinogenicity of newly expressed proteins would strengthen the safety assessment report.

Response

Several types of data are required to provide a reasonable certainty that no harm will result from exposure to the novel proteins, in this case Cry3Aa and NPTII. The information is intended to show that the proteins behave as would be expected of ordinary dietary protein, are not structurally related to any known toxins (or allergens) and do not display any oral toxicity when ingested at very high doses.

Acute oral toxicity tests are done because it is known that when proteins are toxic they generally act via acute mechanisms and at very low dose levels (see the safety assessment report - Attachment 2). The acute toxicity tests are done using purified protein that is administered at very high dose levels, usually orders of magnitude above what the human exposure level would be.

ANZFA considers that the use of acute toxicity tests, combined with other information about the protein, such as its digestibility and structural similarity to known protein toxins, should enable the identification of any potential toxins (and allergens) and eliminates the need for longer term testing. Various expert groups³ have considered the issue of whether there is a need for long-term toxicity testing of novel proteins. The overwhelming international consensus on this issue is that acute toxicity testing is sufficient in most circumstances as most ingested proteins have a predictable metabolic fate. It is only where adverse effects are observed in acute toxicity tests or where the novel protein does not behave as ordinary dietary protein that more extensive analyses may be warranted.

Further toxicological investigations, such as the chronic studies and carcinogenicity studies suggested by the New Zealand Ministry of Health, would generally only be triggered where significant acute effects have been identified in acute toxicity studies. Since no adverse effects were evident for either Cry3Aa or NPTII, even at relatively high doses of protein, further toxicological investigations were not considered necessary.

³ OECD (2000). Report of the Task Force for the Safety of Novel Foods and Feeds, WHO (2000). Safety aspects of genetically modified foods of plant origin. Report of a Joint FAO/WHO Expert Consultation on Foods Derived from Biotechnology.

(iii) Presentation of data from acute oral toxicity studies

The Australian GeneEthics Network commented that data from the acute oral toxicity study with the Bt protein was not tabulated and that only a description was provided in the report. For example, some symptoms were described but not attributed to the Bt protein by ANZFA. The GeneEthics Network submitted that such data should be made available.

Response

The applicant submitted all raw data for the acute oral toxicity study with Cry3Aa. This data is held on file at ANZFA and is available both for inspection as well as copying by any member of the public. ANZFA has fully assessed all the raw data for the acute toxicity study and provided a summary of the findings, plus ANZFA's conclusions, in the assessment report. Given the large volume of data provided for this study by the applicant it would be impractical to detail it all in the safety assessment report.

In relation to the specific concerns expressed by the Australian GeneEthics Network about adverse effects that were noted in some animals, these were not attributed to the Bt protein because they occurred randomly across all groups, that is, they also occurred in animals that had not been dosed with any of the Bt protein.

(iv) Toxicity evaluation of the PVY coat protein

Dr Kate Cinch-Jones stated that ANZFA has concluded that the PVY coat protein is non-toxic to humans with no scientific backing.

Response

This issue was discussed in the safety assessment report (Attachment 2). ANZFA used a different approach to that of Cry3Aa and NPTII to evaluate the potential toxicity of the PVY coat protein. This is because PVY infected plants have historically been part of the human and domestic animal food supply with no adverse effects on human health ever recorded or attributed to their consumption.

PVY can be found infecting plants in most parts of the world, including Australia and New Zealand, and commonly infects potatoes, tomatoes as well as a variety of capsicum species. The PVY coat protein is a major constituent of the virus particle, comprising nearly 95% by weight. Given the wide geographic distribution of the virus and the fact that the coat protein is a major constituent of the virus particle it can be argued that humans have a prior history of consuming significant amounts of the PVY coat protein in both fresh as well as cooked vegetables.

ANZFA considers that the long history of consumption of PVY-infected plants without any reports in the scientific literature of toxicity or other harm caused to the population is sufficient to support the safety of the PVY coat protein. Therefore in this instance conventional toxicity testing was considered unnecessary.

It should also be noted that the PVY coat protein could not be detected in tubers from the New Leaf® Y potatoes, therefore human exposure to the protein would be minimal and certainly much less than through the consumption of PVY infected vegetables.

(v) *Glycoalkaloid levels under stress or storage conditions*

The New Zealand Ministry of Health stated that it would strengthen the safety assessment report if an investigation of glycoalkaloid levels after storage or under stress conditions (e.g. exposure to light) had been conducted because glycoalkaloids are known to increase under stress and may change during storage.

Response

The tuber samples used for the compositional analyses, including the glycoalkaloid analyses, were rarely analysed immediately after harvest. Rather, before analysis the tuber samples were typically stored for between one to three months under conditions commonly used by the potato industry, i.e., at temperatures of between 6 and 9°C and between 70 to 90% humidity. Therefore the glycoalkaloid levels provided in the safety assessment report are those found following a period of storage.

In relation to an investigation of the glycoalkaloid levels after exposure of the tubers to stress conditions, such as light, ANZFA does not consider that such an analysis would contribute to the safety assessment. Potatoes are typically not subjected to such treatment because, as stated by the Ministry of Health, it is very well known that it will cause the glycoalkaloid levels to increase. Such an occurrence would not be a desirable outcome as it could render the potatoes unfit for consumption and therefore unsuitable for sale to consumers.

(vi) *Lectins*

Canberra Consumer commented that Monsanto has not given any data on the levels of lectins in the potatoes and also added that they are very concerned that Monsanto has not provided data to refute the work of Ewan and Pusztai on the observed adverse effects of feeding Monsanto's GM potatoes to rats.

Response

The potatoes that are the subject of this application are completely different to those studied by Ewan and Pusztai and that were alleged to cause adverse effects when fed to rats. The potatoes studied by Ewan and Pusztai had been genetically modified to express a plant lectin gene from snowdrop with the aim of improving insect resistance.

Plant lectins are completely unrelated to the Bt protein expressed in the New Leaf® potato varieties and potatoes do not naturally contain any lectins. Therefore, data on the levels of lectins in the New Leaf® potato varieties was unnecessary.

(vii) *Trypsin inhibitor*

Canberra Consumer commented that no data was provided on trypsin inhibitor levels in the potatoes

Response

Trypsin inhibitors interfere with the digestion of proteins and are thus classed as anti-nutrients. Trypsin inhibitors are heat labile therefore they are only a significant public health and safety issue where raw potatoes are consumed. As humans generally do not consume raw potatoes because of the indigestibility of the ungelatinised starch, data on the trypsin inhibitor levels in the New Leaf® potato varieties were not considered essential for purposes of safety assessment.

(viii) Labelling of imported foods

The Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries – Australia (AFFA) expressed concern about the enforcement of labelling for imported foods and stated in their submission that “ANZFA has given little consideration to how imported foods that have been genetically modified will be checked for compliance with the *Food Standards Code*”.

Response

Currently, the majority of GM foods that are entering the Australian and New Zealand markets are doing so as imported foods. At present though it appears very few require labelling under the current provisions of Standard A18. This is likely to change however once the new labelling provisions come into effect therefore ANZFA recognises that enforcement of the new labelling requirements is an important and pressing issue for AFFA.

ANZFA considers this to be an issue that is relevant to all the applications for GM foods, not just this particular application, therefore, it is more appropriately addressed as part of the broader consideration of labelling. To this end, ANZFA has initiated a consultation with the Imported Food Inspection Program of the Australian Quarantine Inspection Service (AQIS) regarding the monitoring of imported foods for compliance with Standard A18. ANZFA proposes to work closely with AQIS on this issue.

(ix) Human health consequences of animal feeding

The New Zealand Ministry of Health stated that it would strengthen the safety assessment report if there was inclusion of the measures taken, if any, to assess the possible consequences for human health of consumption of genetically modified feed products by farm animals.

Response

Many animal feeds are derived from the same GM crops used for human food and concerns are occasionally expressed about whether such practices may pose an indirect risk to humans through the consumption of products derived from such animals, such as meat, milk and eggs.

ANZFA considers that the human health consequences, if any, of the feeding of GM foods to animals should be assessed on a case-by-case basis, taking into account any potential hazards identified for the novel proteins present in the food and changes to the composition of the food combined with a consideration of the animal feeding practices used for the particular food in question.

In the case of the New Leaf® potato varieties evaluated by ANZFA, such an assessment was considered unnecessary for the following reasons. Firstly, because potatoes have a low nutrient content they are considered an inefficient basic feed and therefore in the United States (where the New Leaf® potato varieties are grown), less than 1% of the potato harvest is actually used as animal feed. Use as an animal feed is usually confined to those livestock, typically cattle, which are located in close proximity to potato processing facilities. Secondly, no hazards (toxicity or allergenicity) were identified as associated with any of the novel proteins expressed in the New Leaf® potato varieties. Thirdly, it is known that Cry3Aa and NPTII behave as normal dietary protein in conditions that mimic mammalian digestion therefore even in cases where animals were fed concentrated protein extracts there is no reason to expect that significant residues of novel protein would remain in the animal. In the case of the viral proteins, animals, like humans, have a prior history of consumption of these proteins as a normal component of their food. Finally, no significant changes were identified in the key constituents of any of the New Leaf® potato varieties.

Recently, the Federation of Animal Science Societies (FASS) released a report of a review they conducted of all the data worldwide from research studies on the feeding of GM foods/feeds to animals in which results have been published in refereed, peer-reviewed journal articles⁴. They concluded that the results published so far indicate there are no effects of feeding GM plant material to livestock and poultry on the nutritional value or safety of the meat, milk and eggs derived from those animals. Moreover, because most components of feeds are broken down into smaller components during digestion by the animal, proteins and DNA derived from the GM plants are not able to be detected in milk, meat or eggs.

(x) *Other matters*

The New Zealand Ministry of Health requested clarification of a number of technical points within the safety assessment report.

Response

Where appropriate, ANZFA has amended the safety assessment report to provide the additional clarification requested.

4. Risk management

Under Standard A18, a GM food must undergo a safety assessment in accordance with ANZFA's safety assessment guidelines.

On the basis the conclusions of the safety assessment, together with a consideration of the public submissions, it is recommended that Table 1 to Clause 2 of Standard A18 be amended to include food from New Leaf® Y potato lines RBMT15-101, SEMT15-02 and SEMT15-15. The recommended variation to Standard A18 is provided in Attachment 1.

In relation to the concerns raised in the public submissions with regard to gene technology and GM food, ANZFA has prepared a public discussion paper on the safety assessment process for GM food⁵.

⁴ www.fass.org/fassfact.pdf

⁵ ANZFA (2000) GM foods and the consumer: ANZFA's safety assessment process for genetically modified foods. ANZFA Occasional Paper Series No. 1.

This is widely available and may assist in addressing some of the concerns raised by the public. Other government and industry bodies are also addressing the broader concerns in relation to gene technology.

5. Regulatory Impact Assessment

The benefits and costs associated with the proposed amendment to Standard A18 have been analysed in a Regulatory Impact Assessment (Attachment 3). The benefits of the proposed Standard A18 amendment to approve food from New Leaf® Y potatoes primarily accrue to the food industry and government, with potentially a small benefit to the consumer.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Draft variations to the *Food Standards Code*
2. Safety assessment report
3. Regulatory impact assessment
4. World Trade Organisation Agreements
5. Summary of public comments
6. General issues raised in public comments

DRAFT VARIATIONS TO THE *FOOD STANDARDS CODE*

**A384 - FOOD DERIVED FROM INSECT AND POTATO VIRUS Y-PROTECTED
POTATO LINES RBMT15-101, SEMT15-02 AND SEMT15-15**

To commence : On gazettal

The Food Standards Code is varied by:

(1) inserting into Column 1 of the Table to clause 2 in Standard A18 in Volume 1-

Food derived from insect and potato virus Y-protected potato lines RBMT15-101, SEM15-02 and SEM15-15.

(2) inserting into Column 1 of the Table to clause 2 in Standard 1.5.2 in Volume 2-

Food derived from insect and potato virus Y-protected potato lines RBMT15-101, SEM15-02 and SEM15-15.

SAFETY ASSESSMENT REPORT

APPLICATION A384 – FOOD DERIVED FROM INSECT AND POTATO VIRUS Y-PROTECTED POTATO LINES RBMT15-101, SEMT15-02 AND SEMT15-15

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Nature of the genetic modification

Three lines of Russet Burbank and Shepody potatoes (RBMT15-101, SEMT15-02 and SEMT15-15) were protected against Colorado potato beetle (CPB) and potato virus Y (PVY) through the *Agrobacterium tumefaciens* mediated transfer of two genes — the *cry3Aa* gene from the soil bacterium *Bacillus thuringiensis* subspecies *tenebrionis* (*B.t.t.*) and the coat protein gene (*PVYcp*) from PVY. The insect and virus-protected potatoes are known as New Leaf® Y potatoes.

The *cry3Aa* gene is responsible for the production of the Cry3Aa protein which is toxic to a narrow range of beetles, including the Colorado potato beetle. When ingested by a susceptible beetle, Cry3Aa causes lysis of midgut epithelial cells in the insect gut, leading to gut paralysis, cessation of feeding and the eventual death of the insect. Cry3Aa produces this toxic effect by binding to specific receptors in the target insects. As there are no receptors for Cry3Aa on the surface of mammalian intestinal cells, humans are not susceptible to Cry3Aa. A number of microbial pesticide products based on Cry3Aa are commercially available in the United States, with some being in use since 1989.

The *PVYcp* gene is responsible for the production of the PVY coat protein. The coat protein forms a protective coat around the RNA genome of the virus and comprises 95 % by mass of the virus particle. It has been found that plants can be protected from viral infection through the expression of one of a number of viral genes, including the coat protein gene, in the plant. The exact mechanism by which the viral protection occurs is unknown.

Other genes transferred to the New Leaf® Y potatoes were the *nptII* gene and the *aad* gene (in the Shepody lines only). The *nptII* gene is marker genes used for selection of transformed plant lines during the potato transformation procedure. The *nptII* gene codes for the enzyme neomycin phosphotransferase II (NPTII) and confers resistance to the antibiotics neomycin, kanamycin, and geneticin (G418). The *aad* gene is a marker used to select transformed bacteria from non-transformed bacteria during the DNA cloning and recombination steps undertaken in the laboratory prior to transformation of the plant cells. It codes for the enzyme streptomycin adenylyltransferase, which confers resistance to the antibiotics spectinomycin and streptomycin.

The transferred genes appear to be stably integrated and both protection traits are stably maintained over multiple generations.

General safety issues

The potato (*Solanum tuberosum* L.) is a major food crop throughout the world and has a long history of safe use as human food. The main food products to be derived from the New Leaf® Plus potatoes will be processed food commodities such as processed potato crisps, pre-cooked French fries, potato flour and potato starch.

The New Leaf® Y potatoes express three novel proteins — Cry3Aa, the PVY coat protein and NPTII. The Cry3Aa protein is expressed in tubers at levels ranging from 0.08 to 0.38 µg/g fresh weight (equivalent to 0.0005 to 0.0019 % of total tuber protein). The PVY coat protein was unable to be detected in the plants, indicating that if expressed it is at levels less than 1 µg/g fresh weight (equivalent to < 0.005% total tuber protein). NPTII is expressed in the tuber at levels ranging from 0.003 to 0.01 µg/g fresh weight (equivalent to < 0.001% of the total tuber protein).

One of the important issues to consider in relation to genetically modified foods is the impact on human health from potential transfer of novel genetic material to cells in the human digestive tract. Much of the concern in this regard is with antibiotic resistance genes. In the case of the New Leaf® Y potatoes, it was concluded that the *nptII* and *aad* genes would be extremely unlikely to transfer to bacteria in the human digestive tract because of the number and complexity of the steps that would need to take place consecutively. More importantly, however, in the highly unlikely event that transfer did occur, the human health impacts would be negligible because both these resistance genes are already commonly found in bacteria in the environment as well as inhabiting the human digestive tract. Transfer of other novel genetic material from the New Leaf® Y potatoes to human cells via the digestive tract was also considered to be equally unlikely. As the amount of novel genetic material in the New Leaf® Y potatoes is minute compared to the total amount of DNA present it is unlikely to pose any special additional risks compared with the large amount of DNA naturally present in all foods.

Toxicological issues

The levels of naturally-occurring toxins in New Leaf® Y potatoes were assessed as well as the potential toxicity and allergenicity of the three novel proteins — Cry3Aa, PVY coat protein, and NPTII.

The only naturally-occurring toxins in potatoes are the glycoalkaloids. The glycoalkaloid levels in the New Leaf® Y potatoes are equivalent to those of the non-transformed control lines and are within the literature reported ranges for commercial potato varieties.

Acute oral toxicity testing in mice had been done previously for the Cry3Aa and NPTII proteins under other applications and it was concluded that both proteins are non-toxic to humans. No additional evidence has emerged that would alter this conclusion. Dietary intake assessments indicate that exposure to both proteins from the consumption of New Leaf® Y potatoes will be low.

The potential toxicity of the PVY coat protein had not previously been considered. Human beings have a long history of exposure to the PVY coat protein through the consumption of PVY-infected plants. In addition, the data indicates that expression levels of the PVY coat protein are likely to be much lower in New Leaf® Y potatoes than in PVY-infected potatoes.

Therefore, human populations consuming New Leaf® Y potatoes will most likely have lower exposure levels to the PVY coat protein than they would through the consumption of PVY-infected potatoes. Overall, it was concluded that the PVY coat protein, as expressed in the New Leaf® Y potatoes, is non-toxic to humans.

In terms of the potential allergenicity of the three novel proteins, it has previously been concluded that both Cry3Aa and NPTII are unlikely to be allergenic to humans. No additional data or evidence has emerged which would necessitate revising this conclusion. Despite the long history of human consumption of PVY-infected potatoes there are no recorded instances of allergenicity therefore it can be concluded that the PVY coat protein is unlikely to be allergenic to humans.

Nutritional issues

Detailed compositional analyses were done to establish the nutritional adequacy of the New Leaf® Y potatoes, and to compare them to non-modified control lines. Analyses were done of total solids, dextrose, sucrose, soluble protein, proximate (total protein, fat, crude fibre, ash, total carbohydrates and calories), amino acid, vitamin and mineral content. Some minor differences were observed for some constituents however these were not biologically significant and the values reported were all within the literature reported ranges for commercial potato varieties. On the basis of the data submitted in the present application, New Leaf® Y potatoes are compositionally equivalent to other commercial potato varieties.

Conclusion

Based on the data submitted in the present application, food from New Leaf® Y potato lines RBMT15-101, SEMT15-02 and SEMT15-15 is equivalent to food from other commercially available potato varieties in terms of its safety and nutritional adequacy.

1. BACKGROUND

Monsanto Australia Ltd have made an application to ANZFA to amend Standard A18 of the Australian *Food Standards Code* to include food derived from potatoes which have been genetically modified to be protected against the Colorado potato beetle (*Leptinotarsa decemlineata* Say.), one of the major pests of potatoes in North America, and potato virus Y (PVY), a major viral pathogen of potatoes. The potatoes are known as New Leaf® Y potatoes.

Protection against Colorado potato beetle is achieved through expression in the plant of the insecticidal protein, Cry3Aa. Cry3Aa is produced naturally by the *tenebrionis* subspecies of the spore-forming soil bacterium *Bacillus thuringiensis* (*B.t.t.*). The majority of described *B. thuringiensis* strains produce insecticidal proteins active against lepidopteran insects (larvae of moths and butterflies) and a few are reported to have activity against dipteran insects (mosquitos and flies). The Cry3Aa protein, however, is toxic to a narrow spectrum of coleopteran insects (beetles) and shows no activity against other groups of insects such as the lepidopterans or dipterans (Herrnstadt *et al* 1986).

Two commercially available microbial pesticide products based on *B.t.t.* (M-One® and Foil®) have been registered and in use in the United States since 1989. In addition, a bio-insecticide known commercially as MYX 1806 comprising Cry3Aa genetically engineered into the bacterium *Pseudomonas fluorescens*, which has been rendered non-viable, has been commercially available in the United States since 1991.

PVY is an RNA virus belonging to the potyvirus group of plant viruses. The virus is aphid transmissible and commonly infects potatoes, causing serious disease. Protection against PVY is produced through expression, in the plant, of a gene derived from PVY that encodes the viral coat protein. The coat protein forms a protective coat around the RNA genome of the virus. The expression of plant virus genes in plants has been shown to confer varying degrees of protection against subsequent infection by the plant virus from which the gene was derived (reviewed in Lomonosoff 1995). The exact mechanism by which this protection is conferred is unknown.

New Leaf® Y potatoes are not grown in Australia or New Zealand and are currently not permitted to be imported into Australia and New Zealand as fresh produce. Rather, they are most likely to enter into the market in imported processed food commodities such as processed potato crisps, pre-cooked French fries, potato flour and potato starch.

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE GENETIC MODIFICATION

2.1 Methods used in the genetic modification

Russet Burbank and Shepody potatoes were transformed with the plasmid PV-STMT15 using *Agrobacterium*-mediated transformation of potato stem sections.

2.2 Function and regulation of novel genes

Agrobacterium-mediated transformation of potatoes with plasmid PV-STMT15 resulted in the transfer of three genes expression cassettes — *cry3Aa*, *PVYcp* and *nptII*. Each of these expression cassettes is described in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Description of the gene expression cassettes in PV-STMT15

Cassette	Genetic element	Source	Function
<i>cry3Aa</i>	ArabSSU1A promoter	<i>Arabidopsis thaliana</i> ribulose-1,5-bisphosphate carboxylase (Rubisco) small subunit <i>at</i> s 1A promoter (Almeida <i>et al</i> 1989, Wong <i>et al</i> 1992).	Constitutive plant promoter.
	<i>cry3Aa</i>	Coding region of the <i>B.t.t.</i> Band 3 protein (Perlak <i>et al</i> 1993).	Confers protection against a narrow spectrum of Coleopterans, including Colorado potato beetle.
	NOS 3' terminator	The 3' non-translated region of the nopaline synthase gene from the Ti plasmid of <i>Agrobacterium tumefaciens</i> (Depicker <i>et al</i> 1982, Bevan <i>et al</i> 1983).	Contains signals for termination of transcription and directs polyadenylation.

<i>PVYcp</i>	35S promoter	A promoter derived from Figwort mosaic virus (FMV) (Richins <i>et al</i> 1987) containing the soybean heatshock protein 17.9 kDa 5' 77-nucleotide leader sequence (Raschke <i>et al</i> 1988).	A promoter of high level constitutive gene expression in plant tissues.
	<i>PVYcp</i>	Coding region of the coat protein gene derived from PVY strain O, a naturally occurring strain of PVY (Lawson <i>et al</i> 1990).	The coat protein forms a protective coat around the RNA genome of the virus. When expressed in plants it can confer protection against infection by PVY.
	E9 3'	The 3' non-translated region of the pea ribulose-1,5-bisphosphate carboxylase small subunit (rbcS) E9 gene (Coruzzi <i>et al</i> 1984).	Contains signals for termination of transcription and directs polyadenylation.
<i>nptII</i>	P-NOS	The promoter region of the nopaline synthase gene from the Ti plasmid of <i>Agrobacterium tumefaciens</i> (Fraley <i>et al</i> 1983).	A promoter of low level constitutive gene expression in plant tissues.
	<i>nptII</i>	The gene coding for neomycin phosphotransferase II from Tn5 in <i>Escherichia coli</i> (Beck <i>et al</i> 1982).	Confers resistance to the antibiotics kanamycin and neomycin. Used as a selectable marker for plant transformation (Horsch <i>et al</i> 1984, DeBlock <i>et al</i> 1984).
	NOS 3'	The 3' non-translated region of the nopaline synthase gene from the Ti plasmid of <i>Agrobacterium tumefaciens</i> (Depicker <i>et al</i> 1982, Bevan <i>et al</i> 1983).	Contains signals for termination of transcription and directs polyadenylation.

The cry3Aa gene

The *cry3Aa* gene was isolated from the DNA of *B.t.t* strain BI 256-82 (Krieg *et al* 1983). A full length clone and complete nucleotide sequence of the *cry3Aa* gene has been published (McPherson *et al* 1988, Perlak *et al* 1993). The gene is one of several that have been isolated from *B. thuringiensis* and which encode a group of toxins known as the δ -endotoxins or the crystal proteins. These toxins are selectively active against several Orders of insects such as the Lepidoptera, Coleoptera, and Diptera. The crystal proteins are produced by the bacterium during sporulation. The protein product of the *cry3Aa* gene, Cry3Aa, is selectively active against a narrow spectrum of Coleoptera (MacIntosh *et al* 1990). When ingested by susceptible insect species, the crystal proteins cause lysis of midgut epithelial cells in the insect gut, which leads to gut paralysis, cessation of feeding and the eventual death of the insect (Höfte and Whiteley 1989). Cytolytic effects on the midgut cells are mediated by binding of the activated toxin to specialised receptors on the cell surface. This binding of the toxin to specialised receptors has been shown to be essential for the onset of toxicity (Wolfersberger 1990, Ferré *et al* 1991). Following binding of activated toxin to the receptors, a rapid change in permeability of midgut cells is observed where there is an influx of ions and water in the cell, resulting in its eventual lysis (Knowles and Ellar 1987).

The PVYcp gene

The *PVYcp* gene was isolated from potatoes infected with PVY strain O, a naturally occurring strain of PVY. The gene is identical to the coat protein gene present in PVY (Lawson *et al* 1990).

The strategy of expressing viral genes in plants to protect against an infecting virus is known as pathogen-derived resistance. Sanford and Johnson (1985) first developed pathogen-derived resistance as a theoretical concept, when they proposed that resistance genes against a pathogen could be derived from the genome of the pathogen itself. This approach was first successfully applied against tobacco mosaic virus (TMV) where disease development was delayed in TMV-inoculated plants expressing the TMV coat protein gene (Powell *et al* 1986). The exact mechanism by which the protection occurs is unknown.

The nptII gene

The *nptII* gene is widely used as a selectable marker in the transformation of plants (Kärenlampi 1996). It is derived from the bacterial transposon Tn5 isolated from *Escherichia coli* (Beck *et al* 1982). The gene functions as a dominant selectable marker in the initial, laboratory stages of plant cell selection following transformation (Horsch *et al* 1984, DeBlock *et al* 1984). It codes for the enzyme neomycin phosphotransferase II (NPTII) and confers resistance to the aminoglycoside antibiotics, neomycin, kanamycin, and geneticin (G418). The *nptII* gene is transferred along with the *cry3Aa* and *PVYcp* genes, enabling those plant cells successfully transformed with the *cry3Aa* and *PVYcp* genes to grow in the presence of kanamycin. Those cells who lack the *nptII* gene, and hence the *cry3Aa* and *PVYcp* genes, will not grow and divide in the presence of kanamycin.

Other genetic elements

The plasmid vector PV-STMT15 is a double border binary plant transformation vector. It contains well characterised DNA segments required for selection and replication of the plasmids in bacteria as well as the right and left borders delineating the region of DNA (T-DNA) which is transferred into the plant genomic DNA. This is the region into which the gene of interest, and the plant cell selectable marker, is inserted. DNA residing outside the T-DNA region does not normally get transferred into plant genomic DNA (Zambryski 1992). The *aad* gene lies outside the T-DNA.

The genetic elements are described in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Description of other genetic elements contained within PV-STMT15

Genetic element	Source	Function
<i>aad</i> (resides outside the T-DNA)	Gene coding for streptomycin adenylyltransferase from transposon Tn7 in <i>Escherichia coli</i> (Fling <i>et al</i> 1985).	Confers resistance to the antibiotics spectinomycin and streptomycin.
LB	A 0.45 kb fragment of the octopine Ti plasmid pTi5955, which contains the 24 bp T-DNA left border (LB) region (Barker <i>et al</i> 1983).	Terminates the transfer of the T-DNA from <i>A. tumefaciens</i> to the plant genome.

oriV (resides outside the T-DNA region)	A 1.3 kb origin of replication region derived from the broad-host range RK2 plasmid of <i>Agrobacterium</i> (Stalker <i>et al</i> 1981).	Allows plasmids to replicate in <i>A. tumefaciens</i> .
ori-322/rop region (resides outside the T-DNA region)	A 1.8 kb segment of the plasmid pBR322 which contains the origin of replication region and the <i>bom</i> site for the conjugational transfer.	Allows for maintenance of plasmids in <i>E. coli</i> and their conjugal transfer into <i>A. tumefaciens</i> cells (Bolivar <i>et al</i> 1977, Sutcliffe 1978).
RB	A 0.36 kb fragment from the pTiT37 plasmid containing the 24 bp nopaline-type T-DNA right border (RB) region. (Depicker <i>et al</i> 1982).	The RB region is used to initiate T-DNA transfer from <i>A. tumefaciens</i> to the plant genome.

The *aad* gene is used as a marker to select transformed bacteria from non-transformed bacteria during the DNA cloning and recombination steps undertaken in the laboratory prior to transformation of the plant cells. Only those bacterial cells that have been transformed with the plasmid containing the *aad* gene, and hence the genes of interest (in this case the *cry3Aa* and *PLRVrep* genes) will grow. The *aad* gene is under the control of a bacterial promoter and would therefore not be expressed in transformed plant cells.

The host for all DNA cloning and vector construction was *Escherichia coli* strain MV1190, a derivative of the common laboratory *E. coli* K-12 strain (Bachmann 1987).

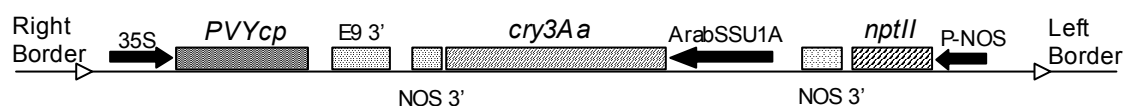
2.3 Characterisation of the genes in the plant

Studies submitted by Monsanto:

Rogan, G.J. *et al* (1998). Characterization of T-DNA inserts present in New Leaf® Y potato line Nos RBMT15-101 and SEMT15-15 by Southern blot analysis. Monsanto Study No. 98-01-37-26.

Rogan, G.J. *et al* (1999). Characterization of T-DNA inserts present in New Leaf® Y potato line No. SEMT15-02 by Southern blot analysis. Monsanto Study No. 98-01-37-29.

Seven lines of transformed Russet Burbank and Shepody potatoes were produced but only three have been commercialised as New Leaf® Y potatoes. All lines were transformed with PV-STMT15 containing the *nptII* gene as a selectable marker. A map of the T-DNA in PV-STMV15 is given below.



The transferred genes in the New Leaf® Y potatoes were characterised using the technique of Southern blotting (Southern 1975). Southern blotting is a sensitive technique enabling the detection of specific sequences among DNA fragments that have been separated using gel electrophoresis.

The overall pattern of the specific fragments detected can be used to characterise the nature of the T-DNA insertion into the genome (e.g., how many loci in the genome has the T-DNA have inserted into, whether the inserted copies are intact, etc).

Genomic DNA was isolated from Russet Burbank and Shepody control plants and from the New Leaf® Y lines RBMT15-101, SEMT15-15 and SEMT15-02. Southern analysis was used to estimate the number of integration sites and evaluate the integrity of the inserted genes i.e., to determine if there had been any detectable deletions, insertions or rearrangements of the T-DNA. The results of the Southern analyses indicate the following:

- (i) line RBMT15-101 — insertion of the T-DNA occurred at three to four loci. At least one locus contains two copies of the T-DNA organised in inverted orientations. For two copies of the T-DNA, transfer was incomplete at the right border resulting in an incomplete copy of the FMV 35S promoter associated with the *PVYcp* gene. One of the *cry3Aa* genes also lacks the *Arabidopsis* small subunit promoter and a portion of the 5' end of the gene. The NOS terminator region of this gene cassette is intact. One of the T-DNAs also has an incomplete NOS promoter region associated with an intact *nptII* coding region. The coding regions of all the other genetic elements are intact. The analyses also showed that no plasmid sequences beyond the left and right borders were transferred;
- (ii) line SEMT15-02 — insertion of the T-DNA occurred at four to five loci. At least one locus contains two copies of the T-DNA organised in inverted orientations and one locus contains two T-DNAs linked by a complete copy of the plasmid backbone. For seven copies of the T-DNA, transfer of the T-DNA resulted in incomplete resolution of the right border leaving incomplete copies of the FMV promoter associated with the *PVYcp* coding region. One of the T-DNAs in this line has an incomplete NOS promoter region associated with an intact *nptII* coding region. One of the *nptII* genes has a truncation within the coding region. All full length and less than full-length copies of the *nptII* gene are associated with NOS terminators. The coding regions of all other genetic elements are intact. Plasmid sequences beyond the left and right borders, which include the *aad* gene and the *oriV* and *ori322* plasmid elements, were inserted into this line. Integration of complete backbone elements occurred in two different ways: at one locus two T-DNAs are linked by a complete copy of the backbone; at two other loci, backbone integration is not associated with the left border flanking the NOS promoter of the *nptII* gene; and
- (iii) line SEMT15-15 — insertion of the T-DNA occurred at four to five loci. At least one locus contains copies of the T-DNA organised in inverted orientations. For two copies of the T-DNA, transfer of the T-DNA resulted in incomplete resolution of the right border leaving incomplete copies of the FMV promoter associated with the *PVYcp* coding region. One of the T-DNAs in this line has an incomplete NOS promoter region associated with an intact *nptII* coding region. The coding regions of all the genetic elements are intact. Plasmid sequences beyond the left and right borders, which include the *aad* gene and the *oriV* and *ori322* plasmid elements, were inserted into this line.

Conclusion

The following intact genetic elements have been transferred to New Leaf® Y potato lines.

Table 3: Intact genetic elements transferred to the New Leaf® Y potatoes

Line	<i>PVYcp</i>	<i>nptII</i>	<i>cry3Aa</i>	<i>aad</i>	<i>oriV</i>	<i>ori322</i>
RBMT15-101	√	√	√			
SEMT15-02	√	√	√	√	√	√
SEMT15-15	√	√	√	√	√	√

2.4 Stability of genetic changes

The New Leaf® Y potatoes have been planted in field trials since 1994. The applicant reports that extensive testing was conducted over a five year period to select the most efficacious lines for commercialisation. Selection was on the basis of continued high-level expression of the Cry3Aa protein to control Colorado potato beetle as well as continued protection against PVY. Lines RBMT15-101, SEMT15-02 and SEMT15-15 have therefore been selected for commercialisation on the basis that they have continued to display protection against Colorado potato beetle and PVY over a five year period. It can therefore be concluded that both genes are stably integrated into the genome and maintained and expressed throughout multiple generations of vegetative propagation.

3. GENERAL SAFETY ISSUES

3.1 History of use

The potato (*Solanum tuberosum* L.) is a major food crop throughout the world (Simmonds 1976). It was introduced into Europe from South America in the 16th century and is cultivated for the production of underground tubers.

Potatoes are generally consumed either cooked (as a fresh vegetable) or processed into crisps, potato flour or potato starch. They are rarely consumed raw because of the indigestibility of ungelatinised potato starch and the presence of protease inhibitors (Burton 1989).

3.2 Nature of novel protein

Cry3Aa

Cry3Aa is a protein of 644 amino acids (molecular mass 73 kDa), which is produced by *B. thuringiensis* during sporulation and is encoded by the *cry3Aa* gene. The *cry3Aa* gene was isolated from *B. thuringiensis* subsp. *tenebrionis* (*B.t.t*) strain BI 256-82. In addition to the full length Cry3Aa protein, *B.t.t* also produces a smaller form of the protein known as *B.t.t* band 3 (McPherson *et al* 1988). *B.t.t* band 3 has a molecular weight of 68 kDa (597 amino acids) and results from an internal translation initiation event within the same gene starting at an internal methionine codon at amino acid position 48. This protein has been shown to possess the same insecticidal activity and selectivity to Colorado potato beetle larvae as the full-length Cry3Aa.

The gene encoding *B.t.t* band 3 protein was engineered for plant expression by being completely re-synthesised to substitute the existing bacteria-preferred codons with plant-preferred codons (Perlak *et al* 1993). The genetic code is degenerate meaning that a given amino acid may be specified by more than one codon. For example, four different codons can be used to specify the amino acid alanine. It has been found that plants often prefer different codons to bacteria to specify the same amino acid, and this can affect the expression levels of bacterial genes when they are transferred to plant cells.

It has been shown that the plant expression of bacterial genes can be improved if the bacteria-preferred codons are substituted with plant-preferred codons (Perlak *et al* 1990). The re-synthesis of the gene encoding the band 3 protein, to substitute plant-preferred codons for bacteria-preferred codons, changed 399 out of 1791 nucleotides without altering the amino acid sequence. The re-synthesised *cry3Aa* gene therefore expresses a protein that is identical to that produced by *B. thuringiensis* subsp. *tenebrionis*.

PVY coat protein

The PVY coat protein has a molecular mass of 32 kDa (Lawson *et al* 1990) and is used by the virus to encapsidate and protect its RNA genome. This is achieved by the aggregation of the coat protein monomers around the viral RNA. The PVY virion is composed of 95% coat protein and 5% nucleic acid (RNA) by mass (Lindbo and Dougherty 1994). The PVY coat protein is encoded by the *PVYcp* gene which was derived from PVY strain O, a naturally occurring isolate of PVY. The *PVYcp* gene introduced into the New Leaf® Y potatoes is identical to the native viral gene therefore the coat protein produced will be identical to the native viral coat protein.

Neomycin phosphotransferase II

Neomycin phosphotransferase II (NPTII) is an enzyme with a molecular weight of 29 kDa and catalyses the transfer of a phosphate group from adenosine 5'-triphosphate (ATP) to a hydroxyl group of aminoglycoside antibiotics, thereby inactivating them (Davies *et al* 1986). The enzyme is encoded by the *nptII* gene, which is derived from transposon Tn5 from the bacterium *E. coli* (Beck *et al* 1982).

3.3 Expression of novel protein in the plant

Studies submitted by Monsanto:

Rogan, G.J. *et al* (1997). Expression levels of *B.t.t.* and NPTII proteins in tissues derived from Russet Burbank, Shepody and Hi-Lite potato plants resistant to Colorado potato beetle and potato virus Y. Monsanto Study No. 97-01-37-01.

Seitsinger, H. (1998). Determination of the relative amounts of coat protein mRNA in genetically modified NewLeaf Y potato varieties compared with coat protein mRNA from non-modified potato varieties naturally infected by PVY. Monsanto Study No. 98-01-37-21.

Bookout, J. *et al* (1998). Expression levels of potato virus Y coat protein in genetically modified and potato virus Y infected potato plants. Monsanto Study No. 98-01-37-10.

Rogan, G. *et al* (1999). Expression levels of potato virus Y coat protein in genetically modified New Leaf® Y potato tubers. Monsanto Study No. 98-01-37-28.

Cry3Aa and NPTII expression

The New Leaf® Y and non-transformed Russet Burbank and Shepody control plant lines were grown in field trials during 1995 and 1996 at several locations in the United States. Leaf samples were collected at approximately six to ten weeks post-planting and tuber samples were collected at harvest. The field trials were performed using randomised complete block design with four to ten replicates per line. Samples were obtained from at least four plots from each site for estimation of the protein expression levels. Expression levels were estimated using an enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA).

Background levels are common with ELISAs hence some of the controls will occasionally demonstrate detectable levels of novel protein. The results are summarised in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Expression levels for Cry3Aa and NPTII in the New Leaf® Y and control potato lines

Line	Mean (µg/g FW)	Cry3Aa		Mean (µg/g FW)	NPTII	
		Range (µg/g FW)	% total protein ¹		Range (µg/g FW)	% total protein ¹
RBMT15-101:						
Leaf	20.444	9.26-33.26	0.058-0.21	0.004	0.003-0.006	<0.0001
Tuber	0.246	0.13-0.38	0.0007-0.0019	0.005	0.004-0.006	< 0.0001
RB control:						
Leaf	0.154	0.00-2.94	-	Not detected	-	-
Tuber	0.060	0.04-0.09	-	Not detected	-	-
SEMT15-02:						
Leaf	22.51	8.66-35.20	0.054-0.22	0.009	0.007-0.010	<0.0001
Tuber	0.194	0.13-0.28	0.0007-0.0014	0.009	0.008-0.010	<0.0001
SEMT15-15:						
Leaf	28.486	5.96-47.35	0.037-0.296	0.003	0.003-0.005	<0.0001
Tuber	0.126	0.08-0.18	0.0005-0.0011	0.004	0.003-0.005	<0.0001
Shepody control						
Leaf	0.066	0.00-1.90	-	Not detected	-	-
Tuber	0.038	0.01-0.09	-	Not detected	-	-

¹ using total protein levels of 1.6 and 2.0% for leaf and tuber, respectively

PVY coat protein expression

Leaf and tuber samples from New Leaf® Y and control plants grown at various locations in the United States and Canada in 1995 and 1996 were analysed in two separate studies. In the first study, only the leaf samples were analysed for PVY coat protein expression using a western blot procedure. For comparison, PVY coat protein expression was also estimated in PVY-infected non-transformed Russet Burbank and Shepody potatoes using a commercially available ELISA. In the second study, only the tuber samples were analysed using a western blot procedure. Concentrations of purified virion (made up of 95 % coat protein) ranging from 1 – 10 ng were used in both studies as the reference standard.

In the first study using Western blot analysis, the detection limit for PVY coat protein derived from purified virion was estimated to be approximately 2 µg/g tissue fresh weight (2 ppm). Using this method, PVY coat protein in leaves of PVY-infected Russet Burbank potatoes was detected easily, its concentration estimated to be approximately 5 – 10 µg/g tissue fresh weight. This compares to an estimate of 25 µg/g tissue fresh weight obtained using a commercial ELISA kit. In contrast, PVY coat protein could not be detected by western blot of leaf tissue from any of the New Leaf® Y potato lines. ELISA was not used for the New Leaf® Y lines because previous attempts to use an ELISA assay had been unsuccessful.

In the second study, the detection limit for PVY coat protein derived from purified virion was 1 ng which equates to 1 µg/g tissue fresh weight. Approximately 1 mg of tuber tissue was assayed from New Leaf® Y and parental controls. Virion-derived PVY coat protein was easily detected at the lowest level of virion assayed in the western blot (1 ng). In tuber samples from the New Leaf® Y lines, however, no coat protein could be detected. It can be concluded that the level of expression of PVY coat protein in the New Leaf® Y lines is < 1 µg/g tissue fresh weight.

Leaf tissue from the New Leaf® Y potato lines was also analysed using Northern blot analysis to quantify the levels of *PVYcp* mRNA produced in the plants. Northern blotting is a sensitive technique similar to Southern blotting except it is used for detecting specific RNA transcripts.

Leaf tissue from PVY-infected non-transformed potatoes was also similarly analysed. *In vitro* synthesised *PVYcp* RNA transcript, at concentrations ranging from 0.25 to 50 pg was used as the reference standard. Messenger RNA was detected in leaf tissue from all three New Leaf® Y potato lines. The mRNA levels were 2.6, 2.7 and 2.7 pg/μg total RNA for lines RBMT15-101, SEMT15-02, and SEMT15-15, respectively. This compares to mean virion RNA levels of 16 and 23 pg/μg total RNA for PVY-infected Russet Burbank and Shepody potatoes, respectively.

Conclusion

Cry3Aa expression levels in the tuber (the edible portion of the plant) are low and range from 0.08 to 0.38 μg/g fresh weight or 0.0005 to 0.001% of the total protein. The NPTII expression levels are even lower, and were consistently measured to be <0.0001% of the total protein. PVY coat protein could not be detected in any of the New Leaf® Y lines, although the *PVYcp* mRNA is readily detected indicating that the transferred gene is transcribed. If it is assumed that the *PVYcp* mRNA is translated, but at levels which are below the current limit of detection, it can be concluded that the level of PVY coat protein in the New Leaf® Y tubers is less than 1 μg/g tissue fresh weight or < 0.005% total protein. This level is well below the level of coat protein found in PVY-infected potato plants.

3.4 Impact on human health of the potential transfer of novel genetic material to cells of the human digestive tract

The human health considerations in this regard depend on the nature of the novel genes and must be assessed on a case-by case basis.

In 1991, the World Health Organization (WHO) issued a report of a Joint FAO⁶/WHO Expert Consultation which looked at strategies for assessing the safety of foods produced by biotechnology (WHO 1991). It was concluded by that consultation that as DNA from all living organisms is structurally similar, the presence of transferred DNA in food products, in itself, poses no health risk to consumers.

The major concern in relation to the transfer of novel genetic material to cells in the human digestive tract is with antibiotic resistance genes. Antibiotic resistance genes can be present in some transgenic plants as a result of their use as marker genes to select transformed cells. It is generally accepted that there are no safety concerns with regard to the presence in the food of antibiotic resistance gene DNA *per se* (WHO 1993). There have been concerns expressed, however, that there could be horizontal gene transfer of antibiotic resistance genes from ingested food to microorganisms present in the human digestive tract and that this could compromise the therapeutic use of antibiotics.

This section of the report will therefore concentrate on evaluating the human health impact of the potential transfer of antibiotic resistance genes from New Leaf® Y potatoes to microorganisms present in the human digestive tract.

In the New Leaf® Y potato lines, two antibiotic resistant genes have been transferred — the *nptII* gene and the *aad* gene. The *nptII* gene confers resistance to the aminoglycoside antibiotics, neomycin, kanamycin, and geneticin (G418) and the *aad* gene confers resistance to the antibiotics spectinomycin and streptomycin.

⁶ Food and Agriculture Organization.

These antibiotics only have very limited clinical use. Neomycin is not used orally because of its toxicity but is still used topically in certain circumstances (Davis *et al* 1980). Streptomycin has mostly been replaced by newer aminoglycosides, although it is still used for special indications, such as in the treatment of tuberculosis and brucellosis (Kärenlampi 1996) and spectinomycin is rarely used clinically.

All three lines contain the *nptII* gene, under the control of the NOS promoter, meaning it will be expressed in plant cells. Lines SEMT15-02 and SEMT15-15 also contain a copy of the *aad* gene under the control of a bacterial promoter therefore it will not be expressed in plant cells.

The first issue that must be considered in relation to the presence of the *nptII* and *aad* genes in the New Leaf® Y potatoes is the probability that these gene would be successfully transferred to and expressed in microorganisms present in the human digestive tract. The following steps are necessary for this to occur:

- excision of DNA fragments containing the antibiotic resistance gene;
- survival of DNA fragments containing the antibiotic resistance gene in the digestive tract;
- natural transformation of bacteria inhabiting the digestive tract;
- survival of the bacterial restriction system by the DNA fragment containing the antibiotic resistance gene;
- stable integration of the DNA fragment containing the antibiotic resistance gene into the bacterial chromosome or plasmid;
- maintenance and expression of antibiotic resistance gene by the bacteria. In the case of the *nptII* gene this would have to involve the acquisition of a bacterial promoter.

In the case of lines SEMT15-02 and SEMT15-15, there may be a slightly higher probability of horizontal gene transfer of the *aad* and *nptII* genes because of the transfer to the plant genome of a linked *Escherichia coli* origin of replication (*ori322*). Depending on the integrity of these components, the presence of these elements on the same DNA fragment could lead to the reconstitution of a plasmid capable of autonomous replication in *E. coli*. A plasmid is more likely to be successfully taken up than an isolated fragment of DNA. This however, would still be an extremely unlikely event.

The transfer of either the *nptII* or *aad* genes to microorganisms in the human digestive tract is therefore considered to be highly unlikely because of the number and complexity of the steps that would need to take place consecutively.

The second and most important issue that must be considered is the potential impact on human health in the unlikely event successful transfer of a functional antibiotic resistance gene to microorganisms in the human digestive tract did occur.

In the case of transfer of the *nptII* gene and the *aad* gene, the human health impacts are considered to be negligible. In the case of *nptII*, this gene occurs naturally in bacteria inhabiting the human digestive tract therefore the additive effect of an *nptII* gene entering the human gastrointestinal flora from a genetically modified plant would be insignificant compared to the population of kanamycin resistant microorganisms naturally present. In the case of the *aad* gene, this gene is common and can be found at high frequencies in natural populations of bacteria as well as clinical isolates (Shaw *et al* 1993). Natural populations of streptomycin resistant bacteria are far more likely to be sources of transferred antibiotic resistance than ingested plant material.

In relation to transfer of other novel genetic material to human cells via the digestive tract, this is also equally unlikely to occur. In considering the potential impact on human health, it is important to note that humans have always consumed large amounts of DNA as a normal component of food and there is no evidence that this consumption has had any adverse effect on human health. Furthermore, current scientific knowledge has not revealed any DNA sequences from ingested foods that have been incorporated into human DNA. Novel DNA sequences in genetically modified foods comprise only a minute fraction of the total DNA in the food (generally less than 0.01%) and are therefore unlikely to pose any special additional risks compared with the large amount of DNA naturally present in all foods.

Conclusion

It is extremely unlikely that the kanamycin or streptomycin resistance genes would transfer from the New Leaf® Y potatoes to bacteria in the human digestive tract because of the number and complexity of steps that would need to take place consecutively. In the highly unlikely event that the genes were transferred the human health impacts would be negligible because both antibiotic resistance genes are already commonly found in bacteria in the environment as well as inhabiting the human digestive tract and both antibiotics have very little, if any, clinical use in Australia and New Zealand.

It is also equally unlikely that other novel genetic material from the New Leaf® Y potatoes would be transferred to human cells via the digestive tract. The novel genetic material in the potatoes comprises only a minute fraction of the total DNA therefore it is unlikely to pose any special additional risks compared with the large amount of DNA naturally present in all foods.

4. TOXICOLOGICAL ISSUES

4.1 Levels of naturally-occurring toxins

Wild tuberous *Solanum* species contain high concentrations of the toxic glycoalkaloids, which are very bitter in taste. The presence of glycoalkaloids in *Solanum* species is generally believed to be a natural plant defense mechanism against pests and diseases (Conner 1995). Modern potato cultivars accumulate high glycoalkaloid concentrations in green shoot tissue and in tubers upon exposure to light. In some cultivars, significant concentrations of glycoalkaloids can also accumulate in tubers not exposed to light. The variation in glycoalkaloid content of tubers can be attributed to both genetic effects and the environmental conditions under which the plants are grown and stored following harvest (van Gelder 1990). The concentration of glycoalkaloids in potato tubers in advanced lines of modern breeding programs is usually routinely monitored (Morris and Lee 1984).

Studies submitted by Monsanto:

Lavrik, P.B. *et al* (1997). Compositional analyses of potato tubers derived from cvs. Russet Burbank, Shepody and Hi-Lite potato plants resistant to Colorado potato beetle and potato virus Y. Monsanto Study No. 96-01-37-24.

Analyses for total glycoalkaloids (solanines and chaconines) were done on tubers collected from field trials of New Leaf® Y and control lines grown in 1995 and 1996 at three locations in the United States and two locations in Canada. At each location, eight to fifteen replicated plots were grown per line. A summary of the results is presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Mean levels of total glycoalkaloids in tubers from New Leaf® Y and Russet Burbank and Shepody control lines grown in 1995 and 1996.

Line	Total glycoalkaloids ¹ (standard error)
RBMT15-101	10.6 (2.54)
Russet Burbank control	11.7 (2.54)
Literature range	3.1-16.1
SEMT15-02	5.5 (1.10)
SEMT15-15	5.3 (1.09)
Shepody control	4.6 (1.07)
Literature range	Not available (2.5-16.1 for Russet Burbank, Atlantic, Gemchip , Norchip)

¹ values are mg/100 g fresh weight

Conclusion

The glycoalkaloid levels of the New Leaf® Y potato tubers are equivalent to those of the non-transformed control lines and are within the literature reported ranges for commercial potato varieties.

4.2 Potential toxicity of novel proteins

All three New Leaf® Y potato lines express the Cry3Aa protein and the data suggests, although there is no direct evidence, that they may also express the PVY coat protein. In addition to these two proteins, all three lines also express the NPTII protein. This section of the report will therefore assess the potential toxicity of these three proteins.

Cry3Aa

Cry3Aa is insecticidal only to Coleopteran insects (MacIntosh *et al* 1990) and its specificity of action is directly attributable to the presence of specific receptors in the target insects (Wolfersberger 1990, Ferré *et al* 1991). There are no receptors for the δ -endotoxins of *B. thuringiensis*, including Cry3Aa, on the surface of mammalian intestinal cells (Hubert *et al* 1995), therefore, humans, as well as other mammals, are not susceptible to this protein.

The potential toxicity of Cry3Aa was previously assessed for New Leaf® potatoes under Application A382 where acute oral toxicity studies in mice were submitted for evaluation. These studies are also relevant to this application as the gene construct for the *cry3Aa* gene used in the New Leaf® Y potatoes will give rise to an identical protein to that produced in the New Leaf® potatoes. Acute animal toxicity tests are used since – if toxic – proteins are known to act via acute mechanisms and laboratory animals have been shown to exhibit acute toxic effects from exposure to proteins known to be toxic to humans (Sjoblad *et al* 1992). For a detailed summary of the toxicity study refer to the safety evaluation for Application A382 – New Leaf® potatoes. A brief summary of the findings is presented below.

The Cry3Aa protein used in the toxicity study was produced in *E. coli* because the plant lines did not express enough protein for purification of large quantities for toxicity testing. Data was presented to demonstrate that the bacterially produced Cry3Aa is equivalent to the plant produced Cry3Aa in terms of its molecular mass, N-terminal amino acid sequence, lack of glycosylation, and biological activity. Therefore, the *E. coli* produced Cry3Aa is considered to represent a suitable substitute for plant produced Cry3Aa.

The Cry3Aa protein was administered by gavage to CD-1 mice at doses up to 5220 mg/kg body weight for a period of seven days. No abnormal clinical signs were observed in the mice during the study that could be attributed to the treatment. No significant differences were observed in body weight, cumulative body weight or food consumption. Several minor pathologic changes were observed at necropsy but these were randomly distributed among all groups and could not be attributed to the treatment. On the basis of these findings the Cry3Aa protein was considered to be non-toxic to humans.

PVY coat protein

Studies submitted by Monsanto:

Naumovich, L. and Kaniewski, W. (1994). The infection of the *Solanum tuberosum*, Russet Burbank potato, by PVX, PVY and PLRV viruses during the cultivation of the tuber. A biology study presented to the Monsanto/St Louis post-dispatch greater St Louis science fair.

Evidence from Northern analyses demonstrates that the *PVYcp* gene is transcribed to give rise to mRNA. Expression studies using Western blot analysis, however, are unable to detect the presence of the PVY coat protein in the New Leaf® Y potatoes. In the absence of any evidence to show that coat protein is not produced it must be assumed that coat protein is expressed in the New Leaf® Y potatoes but at levels which are below the level of current detection methods.

PVY is a common pathogen of potatoes. PVY infection of potatoes is controlled today through the use of seed certification programs. Despite these seed certification programs, data from a recent survey, commissioned by the applicant, of potato tubers grown in the United States and available in grocery stores indicates that between 19 and 38% of potatoes are infected with PVY. This indicates that even today humans are continually exposed to PVY coat protein through the consumption of PVY-infected potatoes. There have been no reports of any adverse health effects resulting from this exposure.

The coat protein gene transferred to the New Leaf® Y potatoes was derived from an isolate of PVY obtained from a naturally infected potato in the United States. Therefore, the PVY coat protein expressed in the New Leaf® Y potatoes identical to that which is present in PVY-infected potatoes. As there is a history of safe human exposure to PVY coat protein and the protein expressed in the New Leaf® Y potatoes is identical to that which is found in naturally infected potatoes, toxicity testing of the protein in animals is considered unnecessary.

PVY coat protein is detectable in PVY-infected potato plants at levels up to at least 10µg/g tissue fresh weight whereas the level of coat protein expression in the New Leaf® Y potatoes is below the limit of detection (<1 µg/g tissue fresh weight). Therefore exposure to PVY coat protein from the consumption of New Leaf® Y potatoes is likely to be much less than from the consumption of PVY-infected potatoes.

Conclusion

There is a long history of safe human exposure to the PVY coat protein through the consumption of PVY-infected potatoes. In addition, the evidence indicates that exposure to the PVY coat protein from the consumption of New Leaf® Y potatoes is likely to be much lower than from the consumption of PVY-infected potatoes. As there is a long history of safe human exposure to the PVY coat protein without any reported adverse health effects it can be concluded that the PVY coat protein, as expressed in the New Leaf® Y potatoes, is non-toxic to humans.

Neomycin phosphotransferase II

The potential toxicity of NPTII was assessed for New Leaf® potatoes under Application A382 where acute oral toxicity studies in mice were submitted for evaluation. These studies are also relevant to this application as the gene construct for the *nptII* gene used in the New Leaf® Y potatoes will give rise to an identical protein to that produced in the New Leaf® potatoes. For a detailed summary of the toxicity study, refer to the safety evaluation for Application A382 – New Leaf® potatoes. A brief summary of the findings is presented below.

The NPTII protein used in the study was produced from *E. coli* because the plant lines did not express enough protein for purification of large quantities for toxicity testing. Data was presented to show that the *E. coli* produced NPTII is equivalent to the plant produced NPTII in terms of its molecular mass, N-terminal amino acid sequence, lack of glycosylation, and biological activity. The *E. coli* produced NPTII is therefore considered to represent a suitable substitute for plant produced NPTII.

The NPTII protein was administered by gavage to mice at doses up to 5000 mg/kg body weight for a period of 8-9 days. There were no statistically significant differences in mean body weights or cumulative body weight gain in any of the treated groups. No abnormal clinical signs were noted, there were no unscheduled deaths and there were no differences in mean terminal body weights. No gross lesions were observed at necropsy. On the basis of these findings NPTII was considered to be non-toxic to humans.

4.2 Levels of naturally-occurring allergenic proteins

Potatoes are not generally regarded as major sources of food allergy, although patatin, the main storage protein of potatoes, has recently been reported to induce an allergic reaction in some individuals (Seppälä *et al.*, 1999). The clinical importance of patatin as a food allergen has yet to be confirmed.

As potatoes are not classified as major sources of food allergy, and there have yet to be any confirmed potato allergens described, an assessment of the naturally-occurring allergenic proteins of New Leaf® Y potatoes is unnecessary.

4.3 Potential allergenicity of novel protein

The concerns regarding potential allergenicity of novel proteins are two fold. Firstly, there are concerns that the ability to express new or different proteins in food will result in the transfer of allergens from one food to another, thereby causing some individuals to develop allergic reactions to food they have not previously been allergic to.

Secondly, there are concerns that the transfer of novel proteins to food will lead to the development of new allergies in certain individuals. The former is more easily addressed than the latter because if an allergen is already known it is possible, using human sera or human skin tests, to test if it has been transferred. There are no reliable tests or animal models, however, which enable the prediction of the allergenic potential of novel proteins. Instead, potential allergenicity can only be indicated by examination of a number of characteristics of the novel protein, such as whether it is derived from a known allergenic source, its physical/chemical characteristics (most allergens have a molecular mass between 10 and 70 kDa, are glycosylated, and are resistant to acid and protease degradation), whether it has any sequence similarity to any known allergens, and whether it is likely to be present in large amounts in the food as consumed and therefore have potential for allergic sensitisation.

There are potentially three new proteins expressed in the New Leaf® Y potatoes – Cry3Aa, PVY coat protein, and NPTII. The potential allergenicity of Cry3Aa and NPTII was previously considered for New Leaf® potatoes, under Application A382. The findings of those assessments are briefly summarised.

Cry3Aa and NPTII

For Cry3Aa and NPTII it was concluded that both proteins are within the size range of known allergens, however, neither of the proteins is glycosylated and both are rapidly degraded in the proteolytic and acid conditions of simulated gastric fluid suggesting they would not survive mammalian digestion. None of the proteins have any significant similarity to known allergens, nor are they present in large amounts in potato tubers. On the basis of this data and on the basis that humans have a prior history of exposure to these proteins with no recorded instances of allergenicity, it was concluded that Cry3Aa and NPTII are unlikely to be allergenic to humans. No additional data or evidence has emerged which would necessitate revising this conclusion.

PVY coat protein

The potential allergenicity of the PVY coat protein has not previously been considered. The same considerations that apply to the toxicity of the PVY coat protein also apply to a consideration of its allergenicity. The consumption of PVY-infected tubers appears to be quite widespread among the human population. Despite this widespread consumption there have been no reports of any adverse health effects, including allergenicity, which can be attributed to the presence of the virus, including its coat protein, which accounts for 95% by mass of the virus particle. The PVY coat protein is expressed in the New Leaf® Y potatoes at very low levels and therefore is even less likely than coat protein expressed in PVY-infected potatoes to have potential for allergic sensitisation. On the basis of this information, it can be concluded that the PVY coat protein, as expressed in the New Leaf® Y potatoes, is unlikely to be allergenic to humans.

5. NUTRITIONAL ISSUES

5.1 Nutrient analysis

There are concerns that genetic modification will affect the overall nutritional composition of a food, or cause unintended changes that could adversely affect the safety of the product.

Therefore a safety assessment of food produced from transgenic plants must include analysis of the composition of the food, based on a comparison with other commercial varieties of the crop. Generally, comparisons are made not only with the parental line but also with other non-transformed. If the parameter for the transformed line is within the normal range for non-transformed lines, this is considered acceptable (Hammond and Fuchs 1998).

In undertaking a compositional analysis of potatoes there are a number of key defining nutrients and constituents that should be measured as part of that analysis. They are total tuber solids (measured as tuber dry matter), sugars, protein and vitamin C. Tuber solids are an important quality factor for processing and are also the single most important determinant of culinary appeal (Murphy *et al* 1967). Approximately 75% of the dry matter content of potatoes consists of starch. The remainder is composed of sugars, protein, and assorted cell and cell wall components (Storey and Davies, 1992). The major sugars in potatoes are sucrose as well as the reducing sugars fructose and glucose. They are present in small quantities and are inconsequential as a source of energy. However, like total solids, they are a very important factor in processed food quality. Potatoes also contain measurable amounts of proteins, fats, carbohydrates, and numerous vitamins and minerals. However, they are only a significant dietary source for two of these constituents – protein and vitamin C (Storey and Davies 1992, Pennington and Wilkening 1997). Potato proteins are highly digestible, have a fairly good balance of amino acids and are especially high in the essential amino acid lysine. Measurement of total protein is considered more informative than measurement of individual amino acids as nearly all of the proteins in potato tubers (albumin, globulin, glutelin, and prolamin) have a similar amino acid composition, therefore, changes in their respective ratios will have little impact on the amino acid profile (Storey and Davies, 1992).

Studies submitted by Monsanto:

Lavrik, P.B. *et al* (1997). Compositional analyses of potato tubers derived from cvs. Russet Burbank, Shepody and Hi-Lite potato plants resistant to Colorado potato beetle and potato virus Y. Monsanto Study No. 96-01-37-24.

Rogan, G.J. *et al* (1999). Composition analysis of potato tubers from New Leaf® Y and New Leaf® Plus potato plants grown under field conditions. Monsanto Study No. 98-01-37-27.

The applicant undertook two separate field studies of the New Leaf® Y potatoes. The first study was conducted in 1995 and 1996 at three locations in the United States and two locations in Canada. At each location, eight to fifteen replicated plots were grown per line. Compositional analyses were done of total solids, dextrose, sucrose, vitamin C, soluble protein, and proximate composition (total protein, fat, crude fibre, ash, total carbohydrates and calories). The second study was conducted in 1998 at three locations in the United States. Four replicated plots were grown at one of the sites, whereas plants were grown in non-replicated plots at the other two sites. Compositional analyses were done of amino acid, and vitamin and mineral content.

Key potato constituents

Summaries of the results of proximate and other major constituent analyses are presented in Tables 6 and 7 below.

Table 6: Mean levels of major constituents in New Leaf® Y Russet Burbank potatoes

Constituent	RBMT15-101	RB control	Literature range
Total solids (% FW)	20.7 (0.81)	20.7 (0.81)	16.8-24.5
Sugars (% FW):			
Dextrose	<u>0.24</u> [#]	0.21	0.04-0.52
Sucrose	0.18	0.18	0.10-0.8
Soluble protein (% DW)	<u>5.1</u> [#]	5.4	3.4-7.3
Proximate¹:			
Moisture	<u>1.21</u> [#]	2.26	-
Total protein	11.75	12.30	7.1-14.6
Fat	0.19	0.21	0.1-0.8
Ash	5.81	6.04	2.2-9.5
Crude fibre	1.69	1.66	0.2-3.5
Total carbohydrate	82.25	81.44	84.5 (average)
Calories	377.7	376.9	350 (average)

¹ except for moisture and calories, reported values are in g/100 g dry weight. Moisture is reported in g/100 g of lyophilised tuber powder. Calories are reported in calories/100 g dry weight.

[#] underlined values are significantly different from the control at the 5% level (p<0.05)

Table 7: Mean levels of major constituents in New Leaf® Y Shepody potatoes

Constituent	SEMT15-02	SEMT15-15	Shepody control	Literature range ²
Total solids (% FW)	22.3	22.6	22.7	16.8-26.8
Sugars (% FW):				
Dextrose	0.22	<u>0.21</u> [#]	0.23	0.03-0.52
Sucrose	0.28	0.31	0.29	0.05-0.88
Soluble protein (% DW)	<u>6.6</u> [#]	6.4	6.3	3.3-7.3
Proximate¹:				
Moisture	1.52	1.56	1.54	-
Total protein	11.43	10.76	11.03	7.1-14.6
Fat	0.17	<u>0.19</u> [#]	0.14	0.1-0.8
Ash	4.63	4.64	4.69	2.2-9.5
Crude fibre	1.33	1.42	1.53	0.2-3.5
Total carbohydrate	83.77	84.4	84.1	84.5 (average)
Calories	382.3	382.4	381.9	350 (average)

¹ except for moisture and calories, reported values are in g/100 g dry weight. Moisture is reported in g/100 g of lyophilised tuber powder. Calories are reported in calories/100 g dry weight.

² Literature ranges are not available for Shepody potatoes therefore the values reported are for Russet Burbank, Atlantic, Gemchip and Norchip varieties, combined.

[#] underlined values are significantly different from the control at the 5% level (p<0.05)

In line RBMT15-101, dextrose content is slightly elevated compared to the control, whereas soluble protein and moisture content are slightly decreased compared to the control. These differences are minor and have no biological or nutritional significance therefore they do not represent a cause for concern. The values reported are also well within the literature reported ranges for the Russet Burbank cultivar. All other values reported for major constituents of the New Leaf® Y Russet Burbank line are equivalent to those of the control.

In Shepody line SEMT15-02, soluble protein content is slightly elevated compared to the control. For line SEMT15-15, dextrose content is slightly decreased compared to the control, whereas fat content is slightly elevated compared to the control. Once again, the differences reported are not large and do not have any biological or nutritional significance. The values reported are also well within the literature reported ranges for common commercial varieties of potatoes. All other values reported for major constituents of the New Leaf® Y Shepody lines are equivalent to those of the control.

Amino acid content

The concentration of 18 out of a total of 20 amino acids was measured for the New Leaf® Y potato lines. The two amino acids not analysed were asparagine and glutamine. The data obtained on the amino acid composition of the New Leaf® Y potato lines is summarised in Tables 8 and 9 below.

Table 8: Mean levels (range) of amino acids in New Leaf® Y Russet Burbank line

Amino acid	RBMT15-101	RB control	Literature range
	(mg/200 g tuber fresh weight)		
Aspartic acid	1194 (1020-1346)	1250 (728-1630)	677-1476
Threonine	138 (125-148)	147 (119-173)	102-214
Serine	145 (136-157)	155 (124-185)	125-255
Glutamic acid	751 (644-826)	793 (516-1055)	583-1207
Proline	117 (97-134)	119 (88-160)	89-366
Glycine	114 (106-117)	121 (107-143)	92-195
Alanine	107 (102-114)	117 (99-135)	87-238
Cysteine	59 (54-65)	62 (57-70)	48-93
Valine	208 (193-225)	218 (175-284)	196-363
Methionine	54 (50-58)	56 (41-84)	57-100
Isoleucine	131 (119-141)	139 (117-178)	119-238
Leucine	207 (183-220)	220 (176-263)	171-346
Tyrosine	121 (100-134)	144 (117-178)	114-236
Phenylalanine	158 (144-167)	168 (133-208)	138-272
Histidine	79 (67-89)	82 (66-100)	33-117
Lysine	227 (203-243)	233 (193-291)	154-342
Arginine	187 (170-194)	200 (145-254)	175-362
Tryptophan	43 (36-52)	42 (34-54)	29-70

Table 9: Mean levels (range) of amino acids in New Leaf® Y Shepody lines

Amino acid	SEMT15-02	SEMT15-15	Shepody Control	Literature range
	(mg/200 g tuber fresh weight)			
Aspartic acid	919 (615-1152)	994 (702-1404)	1002 (671-1325)	677-1476
Threonine	186 (142-221)	202 (158-279)	183 (139-226)	102-214
Serine	191 (148-232)	202 (149-287)	188 (141-230)	125-255
Glutamic acid	866 (663-1073)	977 (857-1174)	966 (773-1181)	583-1207
Proline	172 (127-232)	181 (130-272)	165 (119-202)	89-366
Glycine	166 (133-197)	179 (148-250)	162 (133-185)	92-195
Alanine	149 (118-172)	163 (134-220)	146 (119-172)	87-238
Cysteine	79 (72-90)	84 (76-109)	76 (67-87)	48-93
Valine	219 (187-272)	249 (223-346)	226 (201-248)	196-363
Methionine	75 (63-85)	84 (72-106)	72 (55-84)	57-100
Isoleucine	160 (130-208)	184 (160-259)	164 (137-187)	119-238
Leucine	304 (227-363)	332 (252-461)	292 (214-359)	171-346
Tyrosine	146 (128-171)	171 (152-228)	151 (137-161)	114-236
Phenylalanine	200 (162-240)	226 (193-315)	202 (165-228)	138-272
Histidine	85 (73-94)	94 (82-128)	87 (76-97)	33-117
Lysine	277 (231-318)	304 (266-410)	275 (226-315)	154-342
Arginine	220 (174-259)	251 (201-340)	242 (172-314)	175-362
Tryptophan	43 (39-49)	46 (36-67)	43 (35-49)	29-70

The values reported for amino acids are all comparable to the literature reported ranges.

Vitamin and mineral content

Data obtained for the vitamin and mineral composition of the New Leaf® Y potato lines is summarised in Tables 10 and 11 below.

Table 10: Mean levels (range) of vitamins and minerals in New Leaf® Y Russet Burbank line

	RBMT15-101	RB control	Literature range¹
(mg/200 g fresh weight, except for vitamin C which is reported as mg/100 g fresh weight)			
Vitamin C	<u>14.5</u> [#] (NA)	13.4 (NA)	10.3-22.0
Vitamin B6	0.52 (0.46-0.54)	0.52 (0.45-0.56)	0.26-0.82
Niacin	4.11 (3.34-4.46)	4.06 (3.49-4.60)	0.18-6.2
Copper	0.30 (0.11-0.42)	0.32 (0.14-0.50)	0.03-1.4
Magnesium	49.8 (48.0-52.3)	51.5 (47.1-66.1)	22.5-110
Potassium	996.6 (826.5-1151.9)	1080.7 (979.2-1202.7)	700-1250

¹ The values reported are for Russet Burbank, Atlantic, Gemchip and Norchip varieties, combined.

[#] underlined values are significantly different from the control at the 5% level (p<0.05)

Table 11: Mean levels (range) of vitamins and minerals in New Leaf® Y Shepody lines

	SEMT15-02	SEMT15-15	Shepody control	Literature range¹
(mg/200 g fresh weight, except for vitamin C which is reported as mg/100 g fresh weight)				
Vitamin C	22.7 (NA)	23.9 (NA)	23.8 (NA)	10.3-22.0
Vitamin B6	0.56 (0.49-0.62)	0.50 (0.32-0.72)	0.52 (0.40-0.62)	0.26-0.82
Niacin	4.55 (4.14-5.05)	4.78 (3.98-5.86)	4.43 (3.73-5.15)	0.18-6.2
Copper	0.41 (0.20-0.61)	0.48 (0.23-1.10)	0.39 (0.20-0.53)	0.03-1.4
Magnesium	53.1 (48.2-67.2)	56.9 (47.9-90.0)	54.2 (48.9-65.5)	22.5-110
Potassium	1097 (997-1327)	1135 (972-1634)	1162 (1106-1259)	700-1250

¹ Literature ranges are not available for Shepody potatoes therefore the values reported are for Russet Burbank, Atlantic, Gemchip and Norchip varieties, combined.

Line RBMT15-101 has a slightly elevated vitamin C content compared to the control. The difference, however, is minor and of no biological significance. The value reported is also within the literature reported range for vitamin C content of Russet Burbank potatoes. No other significant differences in vitamin and mineral content were observed between the New Leaf® Y potatoes and the control line and the values reported were all within the literature reported ranges for potato varieties.

Conclusion

Based on the data submitted in the present application, the New Leaf® Y potato lines are compositionally equivalent to other commercial varieties of potato.

5.2 Levels of anti-nutrients

The only known anti-nutrient present in potato is trypsin inhibitor. Trypsin inhibitors are classed as anti-nutrients because they interfere with the digestion of proteins leading to decreased animal growth. Trypsin inhibitors are heat labile and are destroyed during the cooking process or during processing when heat treatment is applied.

As heating inactivates trypsin inhibitor, its presence is only an issue when raw potatoes are consumed. Humans rarely consume raw potatoes due to the indigestibility of the ungelatinised starch.

5.3 Ability to support typical growth and well-being

In assessing the safety of food produced using gene technology, a key factor is the need to establish that the food is nutritionally adequate and will support typical growth and well-being. In most cases, this can be achieved through an understanding of the genetic modification and its consequences together with an extensive compositional analysis of the food. Where, on the basis of available data, there is still concern or doubt in this regard, carefully designed feeding studies in animals may provide further re-assurance that the food is nutritionally adequate. Such studies may be considered necessary where the compositional analysis indicates significant differences in a number of important components or nutrients or where there is concern that the bioavailability of key nutrients may be compromised by the nature of the genetic changes to the food.

The compositional and other data presented in the application are considered adequate for establishing the ability of New Leaf® Y potatoes to support typical growth and well-being. Additional studies are therefore not required.

6. OTHER ISSUES

6.1 Estimation of dietary intake of novel proteins

If the concentration of a substance in a food is known and data is available on the human consumption of that food then it is possible to estimate the dietary intake of that substance for the population. In safety assessments, dietary intakes are usually only estimated in circumstances where a substance is considered to be hazardous. In this way it is possible to determine the likely human exposure to the hazard and thus ascertain whether there is cause for concern.

None of the novel proteins in the New Leaf® Y potatoes are considered to be hazardous therefore a dietary exposure assessment is unnecessary for determining their safety. However, such information can provide additional assurance that exposure to the novel protein is low and/or that the novel protein is likely to be present in the diet at levels well below those which have been found to be safe in animal toxicity studies.

The concentration of Cry3Aa and NPTII in the New Leaf® Y potatoes is known but the concentration of the PVY coat protein was unable to be quantified, therefore it is possible to only estimate the dietary intake for Cry3Aa and NPTII.

Cry3Aa is expressed in the New Leaf® Y potato tubers at levels ranging from 0.08 to 0.38 µg protein/g fresh weight and NPTII is expressed at levels ranging from 0.003 to 0.01 µg protein/g fresh weight (see Table 4, Section 3.3).

Australian and New Zealand consumption data is available for potato crisps, instant mashed potato, and potato fries, although no data is currently available for potato flour and potato starch. The consumption data is presented in Table 12 below.

Table 12: Estimated consumption of processed potato products in Australia and New Zealand.

Food	Country	All respondents (g/day)	Consumers only (g/day)		
		mean	mean	median	95 th percentile
Potato crisps	Aus	2.8	38.8	25	100
	NZ	2.9	48.4	40	150
Instant mashed potato	Aus	-	-	-	-
	NZ	0.007	34.6	34.6	34.6
Potato fries, commercial	Aus	16.6	132.5	113	264
	NZ	18.6	141.2	142	300
Total potato products	Aus	19.4	-	-	-
	NZ	21.5	118	112.2	300

For calculation of the dietary intake of the novel proteins, the highest potato consumption figure (300 g/day) and the highest protein concentration was used. This represents a ‘worst case’ estimate and also makes allowances for the lack of consumption data for potato flour and potato starch.

To do the calculation, assumptions about the proportion of processed potato products derived from the New Leaf® Y potatoes must be made. Data on market penetration of the New Leaf® Y potatoes is not available. In the absence of information about market penetration, two estimates are made — one using a very worst case estimate where it is assumed that all potato products are derived entirely from New Leaf® Y potatoes and the other, probably more realistic estimate, where it is assumed that 10% of potato products are derived from New Leaf® Y potatoes. The two estimates of dietary intake for Cry3Aa and NPTII are presented in Table 13 below.

Table 13: Estimate of dietary intake of Cry3Aa and NPTII

Novel protein	Estimated dietary intake			
	100 % market penetration		10 % market penetration	
	µg /day	µg/kg BW/day ¹	µg /day	µg/kg BW/day ¹
Cry3Aa (0.08-0.38 µg/g FW)	24-114	0.37-1.75	2.4-11.4	0.037-0.18
NPTII (0.003-0.01 µg/g FW)	0.9-3	0.014-0.046	0.09-0.3	0.009-0.03

¹ assuming a body weight of 65 kg.

For Cry3Aa, the very worst-case estimate is nearly 3 million times less than the dose found to have no adverse effects in mice (5220 mg Cry3Aa/kg BW). For NPTII, the estimate is at least 10 million times less than the dose found to have no adverse effects in mice (5000 mg NPTII/kg BW). Therefore, even if all processed potato products were to be derived from the New Leaf® Y potatoes, a very large margin of safety exists for both proteins.

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REGULATORY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Regulatory Impact Assessment

The Authority is required, in the course of developing regulations suitable for adoption in Australia and New Zealand, to consider the impact of various options (including non-regulatory options) on all sectors of the community, including consumers, the food industry and governments in both countries. The regulatory impact assessment will identify and evaluate, though not be limited to, the costs and benefits of the regulation, and its health, economic and social impacts.

Identification of affected parties

1. Governments in Australia and New Zealand
2. Consumers in Australia and New Zealand
3. Manufacturers, producers and importers of food products

*Options**Option 1—To prohibit the sale of food produced using gene technology*

GOVERNMENT Commonwealth, New Zealand Health Departments, State/Territory Health Departments	Benefits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no benefits were identified. 	Costs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the governments of Australia and New Zealand may be challenged under the WTO to justify the need for more stringent restrictions than apply internationally. • a prohibition on food produced using gene technology in Australia and New Zealand could result in retaliatory trade measures from other countries. • there may be technical problems for AQIS in enforcing such a prohibition at the import barrier.
INDUSTRY Manufacturers, producers and importers of food products	Benefits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some companies may benefit from being able to exploit niche markets for non-GM products overseas. 	Costs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • food manufacturers and producers will be unable to use the processed food fractions from foods produced using gene technology thus requiring the switch to non-GM ingredients and the reformulation of many processed food products. The cost to manufacturers of going non-GM has been estimated to be \$A 207m in Australia and \$NZ 37m in New Zealand⁷. This is equivalent to 0.51% of turnover in Australia and 0.19% in New Zealand.

⁷ Report on the costs of labelling genetically modified foods (2000)

CONSUMERS	Benefits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no benefits were identified, however as some consumers perceive GM food to be unsafe, they may perceive prohibition of GM food to provide a public health and safety benefit. 	Costs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • could lead to decreased availability of certain food products. • increased costs to consumers because manufacturers and producers may have to source non-GM ingredients.
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Option 2– to permit the sale of food produced using gene technology

GOVERNMENT Commonwealth, New Zealand Health Departments, State/Territory Health Departments	Benefits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increased innovation and competitiveness in the food industry will benefit the economy. 	Costs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • minor costs associated with amending the <i>Food Standards Code</i>.
INDUSTRY Manufacturers, producers and importers of food products	Benefits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • food producers and manufacturers will be able to capitalise on the latest technology. • food importers will continue to be able to import manufactured products from overseas markets including the USA and Canada where there is no restriction on the use of food produced using gene technology. 	Costs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • there may be some discrimination against Australian and New Zealand food products in overseas markets that have a preference for non-GM foods (e.g., Japan and the European Union).
CONSUMERS	Benefits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • consumers may have access to a greater range of food products. 	Costs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • those consumers who wish to avoid GM food may experience restricted choice in food products. • those consumers who wish to avoid GM food may have to pay more for non-GM food.

Conclusion of the regulatory impact assessment

Consideration of the regulatory impact for foods produced using gene technology concludes that the benefits of permitting foods produced using gene technology primarily accrue to the government and the food industry, with potentially a small benefit to consumers. These benefits are considered to outweigh the costs to government, consumers and industry, provided the safety assessment does not identify any public health and safety concerns.

WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION AGREEMENTS

With the completion of the Uruguay Round of trade negotiations, the World Trade Organization (WTO) was created on 1 January 1995 to provide a forum for facilitating international trade.

The WTO does not engage in any standard-setting activities but is concerned with ensuring that standards and procedures for assessment of and conformity with standards do not create unnecessary obstacles to international trade.

Two agreements which comprise part of the WTO treaty are particularly important for trade in food. They are the;

- Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS); and
- Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT).

These agreements strongly encourage the use, where appropriate, of international standards, guidelines and recommendations, such as those established by Codex (in relation to composition, labelling, food additives, veterinary drug and pesticide residues, contaminants, methods of analysis and sampling) and the code and guidelines on hygienic practice.

Both Australia and New Zealand are members of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and signatories to the agreements on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS agreement) and on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT agreement). Within Australia, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) has put in place a Memorandum of Understanding binding all States and Territories to the agreements.

The WTO agreements are predicated on a set of underlying principles that standards and other regulatory measures should be:

- based on sound scientific principles;
- developed using consistent risk assessment practices;
- transparent;
- no more trade-restrictive than necessary to achieve a legitimate objective;
- recognise the equivalence of similar measures in other countries; and
- not used as arbitrary barriers to trade.

As members of the WTO both Australia and New Zealand have an obligation to notify the WTO of changes to food standards to enable other member countries of the WTO to make comment. Notification is required in the case of any new or changed standards which may have a significant trade effect and which depart from the relevant international standard (or where no international standard exists). Matters raised in this proposal may be notified to the WTO as either SPS notifications or TBT notifications, or both.

SPS Notifications

These are primarily health related, and refer to any sanitary and phytosanitary measure applied:

- to protect animal or plant life from risks arising from the entry, establishment or spread of pests, diseases or disease carrying organisms;
- to protect human or animal life or health from risks arising from additives, contaminants, toxins or disease-carrying organisms in foods, beverages or foodstuffs;
- to protect human life or health from risks arising from diseases carried by animals, plants or products thereof, or from the entry, establishment or spread of pests; and
- to prevent or limit other damage from the entry, establishment or spread of pests.

The Agreement on the Application of Sanitary or Phytosanitary Measures relates to any sanitary or phytosanitary measure applied to protect animal, plant or human life or health which may directly or indirectly affect international trade. Whether the SPS measure is in the form of a law or mandatory regulation, an advisory guideline, a code of practice or a requirement, it is the purpose of the measure that is important - not its regulatory status. Each WTO member country is entitled to apply SPS measures that are more stringent than the international standards in order to protect the health of its population. In the interests of transparency, each instance of such non-alignment which could result in an impediment to trade must be identified and justified and the documentation of that justification must be readily available

Each member country is also required to apply its methods of risk assessment and management consistently so arrangements under the SPS Agreement do not generate what may really be technical barriers to trade

Under the SPS Agreement, an exporting country can have resort to the WTO's dispute settlement procedures with respect to such a non-alignment. These arrangements mean there is potential for a code of practice to introduce an SPS measure that may bring about non-alignment with international requirements. Such non-alignment would need to be justified scientifically on the grounds that it is necessary to protect human, animal or plant life or health.

TBT Notifications

A technical barrier to trade arises when a mandatory requirement in a country's food regulatory system does not align with the international standard and it is more trade restrictive than is necessary to fulfil a legitimate objective. However, it can be acceptable for a country to have a more stringent requirement than that set internationally for reasons including:

- Maintaining national security;
- Preventing deceptive practices; and
- Protecting human health or safety.

Instances of non-alignment with international standards which could result in trade barriers must be identified and, if questioned, justified. Voluntary codes of practice are not expected to generate technical barriers to trade except where compliance with a code of practice or some aspect of a code of practice is expected. Consequently, it is possible for a voluntary code of practice to be viewed by the WTO as mandatory and subject to all the notification and other provisions applying to mandatory regulations.

The Agreement on Technical Barrier to Trade relates to requirements covering product characteristics or their related processes and production methods. TBT covers measures that are not SPS, such as requirements relating to terminology, symbols, packaging, marking, labelling, food composition and processing methods.

SUMMARY OF FIRST ROUND PUBLIC SUBMISSIONS

1. National Genetic Awareness Alliance (Australia)

- Believes that the patenting of life-forms and living processes represents a violation of human rights, threat to food security, impediment to medical research and a threat to animal welfare
- Believes that current GM techniques are inherently hazardous, and have been shown recently to offer no benefits
 - Lower yields with high pesticide input
 - Intensification of the corporate monopoly on food
 - Spread of antibiotic resistance marker genes and promoter sequences
 - Possible increase of allergenicity due to spread of transgenic pollen
- Urges governments to use precautionary principle and carry out research into sustainable agricultural methods
- Calls for suspension of trials and sale of GM products and public inquiry.

2. Pola Lekstan and Anna Clements (Australia)

- Are concerned that approval without long-term testing may pose a health threat, that more GM food means less choice for those wanting to avoid it, that Bt may affect non-target organisms, and that herbicide resistance may lead to overuse of chemicals.

3. Arnold Ward (Australia)

- Questions the system of MRL setting in light of the levels of high glyphosate residues in Roundup Ready soybeans and of other chemicals (including the Bt toxin) in GM crops
- Is concerned about detrimental effect of Bt on non-target (beneficial) organisms and on humans, and believes that genetic engineering is imprecise with uncertainties in outcomes
- Believes that the concept of substantial equivalence is inadequate and should not be used to avoid more rigorous testing, and that commercial factors are overriding need for basic research. Also believes that ANZFA's arguments defend the needs of biotechnology companies and food processing industry, and that since ANZFA does no testing itself, the results can't be trusted.

4. Australian GeneEthics Network

- Believes that the data provided is insufficient to make an assessment, and clock should be stopped on the applications. Concerns include:
 - Direct health effects of pesticide residues
 - Possibility of transfer of antibiotic resistance marker genes leading to resistant bacteria
 - The possibility that transfer of other traits e.g. herbicide tolerance to bacteria, could lead to horizontal spread of unfavourable traits
 - Insertion of viral DNA could create new and virulent viruses
 - The possibility that approval could lead to the growing of GMOs in Australia – ecological concerns including effects of, and increases in resistance to, Bt-toxins and the encouragement of increased herbicide use resulting from herbicide-tolerant crops

- The threat to GE-free status export markets
- Believes that the term ‘substantial equivalence’ is not useful– compositional data alone does not establish equivalence

5. Public and Environmental Health Service (Australia)

- Believes that the data provided should cover both the intentional and unintentional effects of the genetic modification. The unintended consequences of random insertion of new genetic material into the host genome could include loss or change of function of gene or controlling element, dysregulation or amended regulation of the gene or controlling element, or production of a novel hybrid protein which could occur in an unregulated manner. They should also cover any compositional changes e.g. nutrients, antinutritional factors, natural toxicants, and define when a change would be considered ‘significant’
- Potential effect of introduced proteins on metabolic pathways should be addressed e.g. over-expression or inhibition of enzymes
- Data should include details of whether introduced proteins are detectable in whole commodities, processed products and highly processed derivatives
- Data should include details of toxicity and allergenicity tests to prove that food is safe, as well as address issues of specificity and potency of proteins. It should also address the ability to support typical growth and well-being
- Data for herbicide-tolerant plants should be derived from studies performed on plants treated with herbicide. They should address the human toxicity of the herbicide and whether residues of the herbicide degradation process are present, toxic and/or subject to an MRL.

6. David Grundy (Australia)

- Considers that the expression of Bt toxins and other chemicals in plant tissues removes the choice of washing chemicals off fruit and vegetables. Believes that Roundup Ready crops have glyphosate or glufosinate molecules genetically attached
- Believes that GM crops should not be used for feed given to animals bound for human consumption, that products encouraging antibiotic resistance should not be used, and that labelling should be mandatory for all products containing GM ingredients

7. Leesa Daniels (Australia) Member of the Genetic Engineering Action Group

- Believes that:
 - Scientific research although limited, has brought concerns to light
 - Substantial equivalence is a subjective principal
 - Comprehensive and mandatory labelling must be urgently implemented
 - The cauliflower mosaic virus (CaMV) promoter could enhance the capability to transfer genes horizontally and has the potential for activating dormant or new viruses
 - Antibiotic marker genes could lead to increase in antibiotic resistance
 - Several of the transformations encourage the use of pesticides, all of which have shown to be harmful.

8. Australian Food and Grocery Council

- Fully endorses the policy of minimum affective regulation, supports these applications, and considers that food manufacturers should make their own choice with regard to use of GM crops or products derived from them

- Believes that since the growth of GM crops has been approved overseas, they would support their growth in Australia if approved through the GTAC/GMAC/OGTR process
- Considers it unfortunate that ANZFA has not negotiated “equivalence” agreements for products already approved overseas to enable approval without having to carry out its own safety assessment. In the absence of such an agreement it supports the ANZFA safety assessment process.
- Believes that an appropriate information and labelling scheme would enable consumers to make an informed choice.

9. New Zealand Ministry of Health

- Referred preliminary report to New Zealand Health Research Council, who stated concern that all safety aspects should be carefully considered in the ANZFA process.

10. Nestle Australia Ltd.

- Supports the continued approval of glufosinate ammonium-tolerant canola, and believes that manufacturers would be disadvantaged were approval not to be granted.

11. Consumers’ Association of South Australia Inc. & National Council of Women of Australia (CASA supports submission of NCWA)

- Believe that current testing procedure is inadequate and that human trials are the only adequate method, as with testing of new drugs. Also that physiological and neurological effects as well as the toxicological and allergenic effects should be looked at, and that an independent body should be responsible for testing
- Do not support the use of antibiotic markers, since they believe they may pose a threat to efficacy of antibiotics in humans
- State that new research has shown that GM soybeans may be a less potent source of phytoestrogens than conventional soybeans confirming the inadequacy of the term ‘substantial equivalence’
- Raise the point that although these crops have been approved elsewhere, this situation may change with consumer pressure
- Do not accept that it is impossible to source food to ascertain whether or not it contains GM ingredients. Believe that if McCain and Sanitarium can do it, then others should also be able to
- State general concern about the risk that MRLs will be raised as a result of herbicide-tolerant crops being developed, and feel that the calculations used are flawed and are not based on safety criteria
- Believe that the use of GM crops in animal feed should also be regulated. A378
- State concern over possible increase in glyphosate use (it is apparently confirmed in one reference that herbicide use increases with herbicide resistant crops), referring to studies that link the chemical to Hodgkin’s lymphoma, and the possibility that Europe may ban it due to adverse effects on beneficial insects. They are particularly concerned that glyphosate is not looked at by the same regulatory body as that looking at GM foods

A379, A388

- State concern over the persistence and toxicity of bromoxynil, and consider that these have not been adequately assessed by the US FDA. They understand that the breakdown product of bromoxynil (DBHA) may be more potent than bromoxynil itself, and believe that a safety assessment needs to be done on this too. This is apparently the main residue, and they believe that this may appear in cotton oil and linters.

A372, A375, A380, A381, A386

- With respect to glufosinate ammonium, state concern about toxicity, neurotoxicity, teratogenicity and residues in food, soil and water. They believe that Monsanto is likely to apply for an increase in the MRL, and that such increases are likely to constitute a health hazard

A380, A382, A383, A384, A385, A386

- Raise issues of adverse effects of Bt toxins on non-target insects and think that it needs more study.

A387

- Believe that raising the amount of a nutrient in a food may have unknown drawbacks e.g. affecting the efficacy of other nutrients.

12. Health Department of Western Australia

- Highlights various health and environmental concerns:
 - the use of antibiotic resistance genes as markers may transfer resistance to animals via gut bacteria
 - the possibility that microbial gene sequences may contain fragments of other virulent genes, and also that ingesting Bt toxins may be harmful to humans
 - the possibility that insects may be more prone to developing resistance to Bt, since Bt toxins have been found to be released into the soil
- Believes that both safety data and gene sequences should be available for public scrutiny.

13. Meat New Zealand

A379

- Concerned at how labelling regulations will apply to sausage casings that may contain cotton linters even if they are not to be eaten, i.e. are effectively a processing aid. Think that labelling should only be used to advise the sausage manufacturer not consumers.

14. BRI Australia

- Supports the approval of all 13 applications provided ANZFA is satisfied with their safety.

15. Food Technology Association of Victoria Inc.

- Supports the approval of all 13 applications provided ANZFA is satisfied with their safety.

16. Diane Davie (Australia)

- Believes all 13 applications should be rejected, since they have not undergone human safety testing here or overseas, and have not been assessed on their ethical merits
- Believes that risks include:

- Bacterial and viral vectors which could affect human physiology
- Herbicide and insect-resistance genes, which could increase allergies and antibiotic resistance
- Environmental risks
- Also believes that ANZFA must heed the concerns of consumers opposed to GM foods.

17. Martin Hurley, David Hook, Ian Smillie, Margaret Dawson, Tee Rodgers-Hayden, David Lovell-Smith (Natural Law Party), Barbara Brown, Ngaire Mason, Robert Anderson (member, Physicians and Scientists for Responsible Genetics), Louise Carroll, Gilbert Urquart, Caroline Allinson-Dunn, Megan Lewis, Peter Barnes, James Harlow, Gabrielle Dewan, Scott Young, Virginia Murray, Stephanie Chambers, Kay Dyson, Peter Fenwick, Joanne Xerri, Paul True, Josh Gill, James & Peysha Charlwood, Mitta Hirsch, Alan Florence, Nicole Paul, Lawrence Clarke, David Snowman, Reg Paling, Mark and Johanna Blows, David and Bev Semour, Richard and Sharon Moreham (see also below), Stuart Drury and Helen Murphy (All Australia), Brennan Henderson (New Zealand) – Generic e-mail objection

- Believe that most Australians and New Zealanders do not want GM foods, there are no benefits, and deferral would not be disadvantageous. Approval should be delayed until they are proven safe.
- Feel that there is insufficient time to assess these applications thoroughly, and there are so many products under development that there is a high overall risk of a major disaster
- Believe that GM foods encourage pesticide use, and applications have made for commercial purposes only, and also that there could be commercial benefit to Australia and New Zealand in remaining GM-free.

18. Richard and Sharon Moreham (see also above)

- In addition to the points above, also think that it is unfortunate that the NZ government agreed to joint approval of food, as the Australian public are less educated about the issues surrounding GM foods
- Think that approval would only prove that ANZFA serves the interests of large multinational companies rather than those of the public.

19. Vicky Solah (Australia)

- Is for GM foods if the safety evaluation is carry out using approved, validated methods by an independent body, if the results are made available to consumers, and if all GM food is labelled
- Is concerned that transformation may lead to disruption of another gene, and that more research is needed before it is clear whether the process is safe
- With regard to herbicide tolerant crops, is concerned that consumers may not be aware of the need to wash products that have been sprayed, and that this therefore impacts on food safety. Also concerned about environmental impact of these chemicals, and of the possibility of resistance necessitating higher pesticide use in the future.

20. Dr Rosemary Keighley (Australia)

- Will not purchase foods unless they are certified GM-free. Believes that Australian producers who do not actually use GM products, but who fail to label them as such, will suffer.

21. Nicola Roil (Australia)

- Believes that GM foods pose health threats and may contaminate non-modified crops

22. Ian and Fran Fergusson (Australia)

- Believe there has been inadequate testing, and are concerned about possible side-effects.

23. Lyndal Vincent (Australia)

- Urges delay of approval until proven safe by extensive testing. Considers that genetic material is being released without knowing what the effects are, and cannot be recalled.
- Believes that there is no benefit to the consumer, and that national economic interests are best served by maintaining a GM-free market.

24. Fay Andary (Australia)

- Does not want any of the 13 products covered by the applications to be approved for inclusion in the food supply.

25. John and Francesca Irving (Australia)

- Thinks that no GE foods should be approved for inclusion in the food chain.

26. Diana Killen (Australia)

- Believes that there is no proven benefit to consumers and in many instances nutritional value is actually lower in GM crops, and it is therefore irresponsible to push through approval without thorough assessment of their long-term safety for public health.
- Suggests that research has highlighted adverse allergic reactions and a lowered immune response in some individuals, and that there are health implications with crops designed to be grown with greater concentrations of pesticides
- Thinks that labelling is essential for consumers to discriminate in purchasing, and that Australia has a unique opportunity in supply of organic and GM-free food.

27. Sheila Annesley (Australia)

- Does not want any of the 13 foods included in the food supply.

28. David and Edwina Ross (Australia)

- State concern for the future food supplies and well-being of their grandchildren.

29. Beth Schurr (Australia)

- Wishes to protest against the threat of GM foods, the possible future detrimental effects and the further endangering of the planet.

30. Beth Eager (Australia)

- As a parent is concerned that neither the long-term effects on health nor the environment are being considered.

31. Bruce Pont and Ljiljana Kuzic-Pont (Australia)

- Believe that safety has not been, and cannot be satisfactorily determined, and that any party associated with GM foods could be legally liable should adverse health effects be seen. Thalidomide, smoking, ‘Agent Orange’ and asbestos all show that such things can affect subsequent generations
- Believe that an increase in use of pesticides will result from pesticide-tolerant crops, and that the emphasis should be on organic and/or safe agriculture
- Believe that GM-food is a retrograde step, contrary to nature and has the potential to destroy the human race.

32. Chitta Mylvaganum (Australia)

- Wishes to know what tests were done to assess negative effects on human and environmental health, how thorough they were, what the outcomes were, are the results publicly available, and what further avenues of inquiry are open to the public
- Requests the prevention of the import or release of any products until tests are carried out by unbiased scientists in order to prove the lack of health or environmental effects.

33. John Stevens (Australia)

- Would be concerned if approval were granted before sufficient research had been completed on potential impacts on human health and gene pools of nearby crops. Once grown, spread via pollen would be impossible to stop, and labelling would not prevent exposure by this route
- Considers that utmost caution should be exercised and import approval denied indefinitely.

34. Tim Carr (Convenor of the Emergency Committee against GE Foods)(Australia)

- Believes that GM-foods are produced using a radical and unpredictable new technology so should be subject to more rigorous testing
- States that it is unknown how the introduced gene will interact with and influence genetic expression in the host genome, and could change the chemical nature of the food
- Considers that health risks could result from the increased use of pesticides, and also that ANZFA should consider wider environmental, ethical and socio-economic issues.

35. Jan Kingsbury (Australia)

- Believes that GM-foods could result in loss of economic advantage for Australia and New Zealand since they are known internationally for pure and safe products
- Believes that foods are being complicated and pushed by big internationals, and organic farmers are being contaminated by cross-pollination.

36. Teresa Sackett (Australia)

- Believes that:
 - The KPMG report on labelling was prepared in a ridiculously short time and provided limited analysis
 - The proposal of ‘no label’ for foods which ‘may contain’ or in which there is ‘no evidence’ of GM material is inadequate
 - Inadequate testing procedures should not be used to declare a product is GM-free just because material can’t be detected. In fact testing methods have been developed that can be used to work out the GM content

- Government and industry seem to be favouring the introduction of GM foods. This will result in the increased use of chemicals and the destruction of soil life
- Organic farming pay high costs for producing healthy plants, while conventional farmers have little restriction on pollution of air, soil and water. Salinity problems, the death of the Great Barrier Reef, rivers and streams has resulted from ignorance in farming and broader community. Such problems will increase with GM foods.
- The implication that the public will not understand the issues is wrong. Everyone needs to be fully informed.
- Asks the question of whether workers in the food industry are to be better informed, and also why no ‘verification documents’ are to be required by retailers? Believes that certification schemes should be on a par with those for Kosher foods and organics.

37. John and Sandy Price (Australia)

- Approval of GM foods and seeds should not be allowed, as it is an affront to the sovereignty of Australia and the dignity of the Australian people. The results of the experiment cannot be reversed.

38. John Scott (New Zealand)

- Encloses article from The Irish Times, which describes the restrictions that have been placed by the US EPA on the cultivation of GM corn. These appear to have resulted from fears that Bt crops may be harmful to Monarch butterflies and that resistance may develop to Bt.

39. R A Randell (New Zealand)

- Believes that all GM products should be placed under a moratorium until the Royal Commission of Inquiry has considered the issue, and until all scientific, philosophical, ethical and moral issues have been looked at.

40. National Council of Women of New Zealand

- Believes that:
 - approval of all 13 applications should be rejected, and that none should be approved for planting.
 - Independently-funded body should be responsible for safety assessments
 - If it is possible to segregate high-oleic soybeans, then RoundUp Ready soybeans should be segregated too
 - Consumers should be made aware of the extent of GM ingredients in their food
 - GM foods, additives or processing aids already on the market must be labelled comprehensively and without extra cost to the consumer – suggest ‘GM unknown’ rather than ‘may contain’
- Appreciates that rejection may contravene the WTO agreement, but consider that the primary role of ANZFA is the assurance of health and safety.

41. Safe Food Campaign (New Zealand)

- Believes that approval should be rejected, and a moratorium be put in place until after the Royal Commission of Inquiry, for various reasons:
 - Possible effects on non-target insects

- Spread of GM pollen may cause contamination of non-GM (especially organic) crops, and may result in the spread of herbicide-tolerance genes and an increase in resistance development. Cross-pollination is considered a particular risk for canola (A372 & A388). Bt resistance development is noted as being a particular risk for A382, A383 & A384
- Lack of long-term testing means health risks are not known
- Use of broad-spectrum pesticides affects wild flowers and non-target insects.

42. Jocelyn Logan, Caroline Phillips (New Zealand)

- Oppose all 13 applications for the following reasons:
 - Testing has not been long-term or independent, precautionary principle should apply. Approval can happen later if GM is proven safe.
 - No clear public benefit, and lack of opportunity for informed choice (immoral and undemocratic). Labelling regulations also unsatisfactory in this respect.
 - Environmental concerns (increase in pesticides, threat to organic farming, Bt resistance).

43. Robert Anderson (member of Physicians and Scientists for Responsible Genetics – New Zealand)

- Considers that the GM issue should be reconsidered in the light of the release of internal FDA documents made available for a recent lawsuit aimed at amending their policy. Attached document (presentation given by Steven Druker, Alliance for Bio-integrity) suggests that:
 - Scientist's warnings have been ignored
 - FDA policy may be illegal, violating the Food, Drugs and Cosmetic Act – Mr Druker believes that the term generally-regarded-as-safe (GRAS) cannot apply to foreign DNA.

44. Stephen Blackheath (New Zealand)

- Argues that ANZFA's approach to safety assessments is scientifically unsound:
 - Antibiotic resistance marker genes have been cited as being potentially dangerous by groups other than ANZFA e.g. the Royal Society
 - Unanticipated toxins and allergens are a concern, and it is suggested that the ANZFA process does not adequately consider these possibilities
 - Doesn't address the question of whether risks exist that are unique to the GM process
 - It relies on data from the manufacturers themselves, with little sway given to evidence from public submissions. Companies have vested interests the results and cannot be trusted (also gives evidence of Monsanto's past dishonesty)
- Believes that ANZFA is subject to undue influence through the directors, and is biased towards being pro-GM
- Suggests that RoundUp Ready soybeans are not substantially equivalent as the stems have been found to be more brittle than traditional lines, and may be lower in phytoestrogen content
- Also cites the lawsuit being brought by the Alliance for Bio-integrity, and the internal FDA documents that suggest concern from FDA scientists, as evidence of the FDA ignoring important evidence.

45. Claire Bleakley (New Zealand)

- Believes that approval should be rejected for various reasons:

- They may be against Maori views
- Further long-term trials are needed and should be carried out by ANZFA themselves - certain trials have apparently shown effects on immune system, allergies and rare syndromes
- Health concerns of pesticide overuse
- The possibility of horizontal gene transfer with respect to antibiotic resistance transfer
- Lack of labelling and the use of the unsatisfactory 'substantial equivalence' concept, which makes hazard difficult to assess
- There is no substantial gain to consumers

SUMMARY OF SECOND ROUND PUBLIC SUBMISSIONS

The draft Risk Analysis Reports (formally referred to as the Full Assessment Report) for A382, A383 and A384 were released for an 8 week period of public comment on 30 August 2000. At the end of the public comment period (25 October) a total of 17 submissions had been received. These are summarized below.

1. InforMed Systems Ltd (New Zealand)

- Accept that the modifications of the potatoes with regard to the introduction of Bt genes will not constitute a hazard to human health or safety and on this ground do not oppose the potato applications.
- Noted that the genes coding for resistance to the antibiotics neomycin and streptomycin groups of antibiotics are present. Commented that international opinion now considers that the presence of such genes should no longer occur and that where they have been used they should either be removed before commercialisation or inactivated. Recognises that the risk of transfer is extremely low but submits that it appears to be a needless potential hazard given current technology. For this reason they do not support any of the potato applications.

2. Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry – Australia (AFFA)

- The main issue of concern for AFFA is enforcement of labelling of imported foods.
- Submits that ANZFA has given little consideration to how imported foods that have been genetically modified will be checked for compliance with the Food Standards Code.
- Areas that they believe need further consideration in regards to imported foods include:
 - Will GM food require analysis other than a label check?
 - Will foods not labelled as GM require analysis to establish that they are GMO free?

3. The National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ)

- The NCWNZ reiterated the concerns expressed in their previous submission.
- The NCWNZ also had the following additional comments on the safety evaluations:
 - They remain concerned that the presence of antibiotic resistance genes could compromise the therapeutic use of antibiotics;
 - As a staple crop for millions of people world-wide the potato must remain sacrosanct, its integrity should not be compromised;
 - They can see no real advantage to the consumer from these new products.

- Submit that these applications all involve some degree of the use of gene technology with potentially small, if any, benefit to consumers. Where these products are found to be substantially equivalent and therefore require no labelling they believe this will give consumers no ability to make an informed choice.
- Believe that until the results of further scientific research are known and the clarification of New Zealand's position on genetic modification is decided as a result of the current Royal Commission, they submit that the foods should be prohibited from sale.

4. Mrs Z. Vallings (New Zealand)

- Doesn't think ANZFA should be considering approval of these potatoes while the Royal Commission is sitting.
- Stresses that GM foods are not substantially equivalent and that the term is unscientific.
- GM foods should be subject to rigorous toxicological tests and these have not been done.
- GM foods must be strictly labelled for traceability as well as consumer choice.
- Cites the recall of Starlink™ corn in the United States as an example of the inadequacy of the regulatory system in the United States and questions whether the corn products are being imported into New Zealand.
- States that it is shameful that ANZFA is copying the FDA and that as far as she is aware there is no consumer representative on ANZFA and that all testing is done by or for the manufacturing companies.
- Expresses concern that ANZFA is relying on companies that are pushing their own agenda and who are not concerned with consumer safety and the right to choose.
- Commented that the recent labelling decision is inadequate and demands full and comprehensive labelling.
- States that bodies like the British Medical Association and the Royal NZ College of General Practitioners have spoken out about the hazards of GM foods, including dangerous viruses like the cauliflower mosaic virus and the use of antibiotic resistance genes. Unanticipated toxins and allergens are also a concern.
- Comments that polls show that New Zealanders do not want GM foods and that approval should be delayed in the long term until toxicological tests are done and the products are proven safe.
- Provided two attachments with the submission – the first attachment being a statement from Professor Richard Lacey who is Emeritus Professor of medical microbiology at the University of Leeds and the second attachment being a copy of an announcement made by the Pesticide Action Network Update Services in relation to the finding of Starlink™ corn in taco shells in the United States.

5. Mrs I. P. Hancox (New Zealand)

- Feels that genetic modification of the potatoes is tampering and does not regard the GM potatoes as good a product as non-GM potatoes.
- The GM potatoes must have detailed labelling so that she can avoid purchasing them.
- Does not regard the GM potatoes as substantially equivalent, therefore believes that mandatory labelling is definitely required.
- Cites DDT as an example of a product that was meant to be helpful to mankind yet turned out to be a poison which can be found as far away as in the penguins and seals in Antarctica, as well as in soils and not able to be eradicated.

- Submits that there are many examples of man made projects going wrong and advises that we should look before we leap and that we should not get blinded by science.
- The submission was accompanied by an article (*Food safety: a scientists view*) from page 3 of the 5 October edition of *Contact*, a Wellington regional weekly paper.

6. Dr Kate Cinch-Jones (Australia)

- Comments that the draft Risk Analysis Reports state that the concerns expressed by the majority of submitters are addressed in the body of the report but no scientific proof is put forward by ANZFA to refute these concerns.
- No scientific references are provided to back up ANZFA's surmise that horizontal gene transfer is unlikely to occur. States that horizontal gene transfer is very real and is a potential hazard that is ignored by ANZFA.
- Cites a number of scientific articles as evidence that ingested viral DNA survives digestion and can be incorporated into the cells of hosts, including their foetuses and that transgenic DNA can transfer into soil bacteria and fungi. Also refers to unpublished work showing that transgenic DNA from pollen ends up in the bacteria in the gut of bees.
- Cites evidence that the cauliflower mosaic virus 35S promoter has a recombination hot spot and is able to function in a number of different organisms such as yeast, E. coli, algae, higher plants and humans. Refers to concerns expressed by Professor Ho that this can cause inappropriate gene expression and may lead to cancer. Urges that until such time as Professor Ho's hypothesis has been scientifically invalidated extreme caution is needed with GM foods containing 35S or related promoters.
- In relation to Bt toxin, comments that the Bt toxin used is not identical to the conventional form and has been shown to accumulate in soil and not to be biodegradable. Submits that despite this knowledge, ANZFA has been happy to extrapolate toxicity data from the conventional form, with no confirmatory testing.
- In relation to allergy testing submits that ANZFA's approach of comparing the structure of novel proteins to a list of known allergens is inadequate to exclude unexpected allergens and cannot substitute for proper in vivo testing.
- Comments that full proteome analysis could and should be done on any transgenic food.
- Comments that no studies submitted by the applicant have been published and therefore have not been peer reviewed and therefore submits that these studies are therefore not scientifically credible.
- Expresses concern about the animal feeding studies and submits that they were conducted using very poor scientific method and that in her professional opinion would not stand up to peer review.
- Comments that no long term toxicity testing was done with the novel proteins (Cry3Aa and NPTII), submitting that not all toxins have acute effects and that some can cause cancer later. Also adds that it is scientifically untenable to directly extrapolate data from mice to humans.
- Comments that it is concluded that the PVY coat protein is non-toxic to humans with no scientific backing.
- Would be interested in receiving substantiating documentation on all the points she has raised and that until such time as the evidence is made freely available it is impossible to conclude that the potatoes, or any other GM food, is fit for human consumption.

- Submits that she rejects ANZFA's risk analysis and the foods on the basis that there are far too many potential hazards from transgenic foods.
- Also submitted a number of comments in relation to concerns about genetic modification of food in general – the (lack of) productivity of GM crops, inability of GM foods to solve third world poverty, environmental risks, and a discussion of the human health risks.

7. Australian Food and Grocery Council (AFGC)

- The AFGC supports approval of all three applications for GM potatoes.
- Submits that as ANZFA has concluded that the insect protected potatoes do not raise any public health and safety concerns there should be no reason for retaining the generic prohibition on their use merely because they are GMOs.
- Commented that they support the application of the revised labelling requirements of Standard A18 to the GM potatoes and their products.

8. New Zealand Ministry of Health

- The Ministry of Health submitted that they believe that the safety assessments for these applications are sound and based on ANZFA's published procedures.
- They had a few comments that they believed would strengthen the safety assessment, namely:
 - Clarification of the background levels of expression for Cry3Aa and NPTII in non-GM potato lines;
 - Investigation of glycoalkaloid levels after storage or under stress conditions;
 - Investigation of phenolic levels;
 - Clarification of the rat feeding trial conducted for A382;
 - Inclusion of the detection limit for the PLRV replicase protein in A383;
 - Clarification of the *PLRVrep* mRNA comparison in A383;
 - Inclusion of a statement as to the presence of PLRV and PVY in New Zealand and Australian crops and consideration of the exposure to the public;
 - Inclusion of histopathological examination as a standard part of the acute toxicity studies;
 - Inclusion of measures taken, if any, to assess the possible consequences for human health of consumption of genetically modified feed products by farm animals; and
 - Investigation of combined chronic toxicity/carcinogenicity to report on the detection of neoplastic effects of newly expressed proteins, determination of carcinogenic potential and determination of general toxicity (including neurological, physiological, biochemical and exposure-related morphological effects).

9. Australian GeneEthics Network

- Recommend rejecting the applications for the GE potatoes because the data on which ANZFA based its assessment was generated, funded and commissioned by the proponent.
- Independent research input results should be required, together with reports on US experience with commercial use of the tubers.
- ANZFA has dismissed Bt proteins as not harmful based on limited feeding studies. This is unacceptable in view of the enormous quantities of potato and potato-containing products consumed in Australia and New Zealand.

- The GE potatoes should be called insecticidal and virus-resistant potatoes rather than insect- and virus-protected as this is sanitised language that implies that the two modifications bring about these traits are similar and will benefit agricultural production and the lot of food consumers.
- Approving GE potatoes for human consumption contravenes the precautionary principle as there are unresolved risks with adding virus sequences and Bt toxin to food products. This is especially so where there is yet no evidence of the long-term impacts.

A382:

- Putting toxins into foodstuffs should not be done without the express approval of end consumers
- Bt toxin is highly expressed and present in relatively large quantities in the potatoes so it is effective against insects.
- It remains uncertain whether Bt toxin is safe for humans, especially if consumed in relatively large amounts.
- Precaution demands that no risks at all should be taken with staple foods.
- New Leaf potatoes contain up to 0.9µg/g FW which is two to three times the concentration of Bt protein in Bt corn.
- Potato is one of the most important carbohydrate sources here so allowing Bt potato products into Australia and New Zealand amounts to approving high ingestion of Bt toxin. Considering the importance of potatoes as a food here, this is extremely cavalier.
- Feeding studies were conducted on species not closely related to humans, on a single age group, and for a relatively short period. Further, raw data was not provided but ANZFA indicated that Monsanto's data could not provide certain information which suggests the experiment was poorly designed.
- Real world experience with GE potatoes from the USA and other countries was not included and is apparently not required by ANZFA.
- Feeding studies at various developmental stages, inter-generational studies or histological examinations should have been required.
- The data from the acute oral toxicity study was not tabulated, only a description was provided. For example, some symptoms were described but not attributed to the Bt protein by ANZFA. This data should be made available.
- ANZFA seems to rely on toxicity data exclusively for ascertaining food safety. No real world data from human consumption was provided, although humans are already eating Bt potatoes and their long term effects on health have been by and large ignored by the proponent and ANZFA.
- Genes conferring antibiotic resistance from two families of antibiotics have been used for the engineering of the GE potatoes. Both antibiotic families included clinically important antibiotics such as penicillin, tobramycin. ANZFA is ignoring the advice of Lester Brown of Georgetown University (USA), a food technology expert, who said that since antibiotic resistance marker genes could confer cross-resistance to related antibiotics which are clinically important, precaution was needed in their use and they should be banned in GE food products. ANZFA is also ignoring the advice of many scientists and professional bodies in its approval of the use of antibiotic resistance marker genes.

A383 and A384

- Potatoes engineered for virus resistance have pathogen genes deliberately added to host plant genomes in every cell. These viral sequences could recombine and create new pathogens. Even if the likelihood is low, the potential hazards are too great to justify the release of viral gene sequences which will be present in every cell of New Leaf Plus and New Leaf Y potatoes.
- Another risk is the use of virus promoters such as the cauliflower mosaic virus promoter. A recombination hot spot has been identified in CaMV sequences. This could increase the likelihood of producing dangerous viruses.
- The particularly high level expression driven by CaMV also leads to the risk of proteins being expressed to higher levels than in normal plants, perhaps creating toxicity or allergenicity problems. This partly depends on where the inserted (novel) DNA ends up in the plant genome.

10. Food Technology Association (FTA) Victoria Inc

- The FTA accepts the three applications on the proviso that long term studies are conducted and are found to produce satisfactory health and safety outcomes.

11. Pola Lekstan (Australia)

- Many Australians do not want to eat GM food.
- The lack of long term testing of GM food and past experience (eg asbestos, Agent Orange) has caused people to become cautious of new technologies unless they are proven safe.
- Much of the safety assessment of GM food appears to be based on a different point of view – if a product has not been proven dangerous or no ill effects have been reported, then the product is deemed safe.
- The risk of horizontal gene transfer should not be taken lightly. When one thinks of the scale on which these potatoes will be produced, the amount of products they will be used in and the quantity that will be eaten by consumers over their lifetime, the chance of horizontal gene transfer magnifies.
- Seven days seems to be too short a period to test for the toxicity of a novel protein and then declare it safe for human consumption.
- The lack of reliable tests to predict allergenicity of novel proteins is another reason to be cautious when dealing with the safety of consumers.
- The assessment does not appear to take into account the fact that genes interact in a complicated way and change their behaviour in response to influences from other genes. It separately analyses the effects of each novel protein and does not seem to take a holistic view of what the outcomes might be from introducing new genes to a plant.
- Food derived from insect, potato leafroll virus and/or potato virus Y-protected potatoes has not been proved safe for human consumption. It appears to have no benefit to consumers. As GM food is yet to be labelled it would be an injustice to allow another GM product on the market.

12. Arnold Ward (Australia)

- Rather than deal with the detail in the applications, provides general information about the risks associated with the use of gene technology and the Bt toxin, and the ethics of gene technology and states that GE potatoes must not be marketed at this early stage in the development of gene technology:
- Recommends that this decision should be deferred until the Gene Technology Bill 2000.
- Hopes that the political level will at least do the right thing and ensure a watertight means of providing categorical evidence of the safety, or otherwise, of genetically modified foods.

13. National Genetic Awareness Alliance (Australia)

- There has been no independent scientific research conducted by ANZFA in their risk assessment process, unlike irradiated food which has included multigenerational animal studies and studies using volunteers who ate only irradiated food.
- Peanut allergies have increased dramatically and it is generally understood but rarely publicised that such allergies may be due to residual proteins in peanut oil in infant formula. Despite earlier assurances that oils cannot sensitise because they are protein free, peanut oil is now banned from infant formula.
- In terms of the new GM labelling laws, what guarantee can there be that refined oils do not contain any residual DNA or protein? Will ANZFA set in place sophisticated independent testing to ensure that claims for GM crop derived oils to be totally free of protein or DNA are truthful? Will all such oils be labelled?
- Enclosed a number of documents discussing the hazards associated with the use of the CaMV promoter, a document on the potential problems associated with “Golden Rice”, and a copy of an open letter from world scientists to all governments concerning GMOs which was submitted to the State of the World Forum in September 2000.

14. Jude Horner (New Zealand)

- Objects to and opposes any introduction of GMs, GMOs and products, local or imported at this immature stage of its development.
- States that there are so many issues that need much more substantial evaluation and scientific research such as:
 - The Crown’s responsibilities under the Treaty of Waitangi.
 - Key strategic issues drawing on groups of persons who are likely to be advantaged or disadvantaged, liability issues, ethical issues, cultural issues, human health issues, environmental and economic concerns.

15. Consumers’ Institute (New Zealand)

- Has ANZFA established that the evidence provided by the applicant has not been superseded by subsequent research?
- On going monitoring of the long term effects of the food should be established.
- Consumers’ concerns about GM foods are much broader than the scope of the tests of these particular products and extend to the whole introduction and approval of GM foods internationally. Much of the concern is based on the lack of independent verification of testing carried out by the developers of the products as well as the failure to do long term and animal testing of the products.

- Do not consider that ANZFA’s assessments adequately address the wider consumer concerns. It is likely that many consumers will remain sceptical that the reassurances of safety are based on comprehensive and appropriate testing and assessment.
- Remains concerned that the use of “substantial equivalence” is not sufficiently rigorous. The principle fails to address the possibility that there may be unexpected changes in the new product which are not identified.
- Acknowledge that while, to date, there has been little scientific evidence that GM foods presently on the market are unsafe, this does not establish that these foods are absolutely safe. There is still much to be learned about the long-term impact of GM foods on human health and the environment and we believe insufficient animal testing and monitoring of the effects on humans has been done to establish safety.
- The laws that apply to medicines are much stricter. Medicines must demonstrate significant benefit as well as safety in random controlled trials. None of this rigour is applied to these foods which whole populations will be exposed to.

16. Teresa Sutton (Australia)

- Registering opposition to the approval of the introduction of GE crops into the Australian environment, and the importation of GM materials.
- ANZFA claims to be concerned with health and safety issues, yet actively supports the growth and distribution of a highly controversial product.
- Biased information distributed through supermarkets by government, at our expense, has been of no help at all – simply broad-based assurances which are not in the least bit convincing.
- This is not surprising since the science is in its very early stages, and there is no evidence available regarding the long-term impact on human health and the environment.
- Would like the following concerns to be addressed prior to any approvals of GE foods being made:
 - The patenting of life-forms and living processes.
 - Animal testing is inadequate for determining GE effects on human health.
 - Funding for this research would be better spent on research regeneration of health oil.
 - The GM techniques are not reliable, there is a risk of spread of antibiotic resistance market genes, and increase of allergic reactions in the populations due to spread of transgenic pollen.
 - There has been no long term testing regarding safety – results are far from convincing
 - Comparisons with conventional foods – regarding safety and nutritional values are inappropriate. MRL levels are unsatisfactory as they stand, and nutrition in conventional foods is as much as ten times lower than that of organic produce – according to the CSIRO. This makes the comparison invalid and further indicates the need for the Australian government to take a leadership role on standards setting regarding conventional and GE food issues, both in Australia and on the international stage.
 - Transfer of traits such as herbicide tolerance to bacteria could lead to horizontal spread of unfavourable traits.
 - Insertion of viral DNA could create new and virulent viruses, loss or change of function of a gene or controlling element or production of a novel hybrid protein which could occur in an unregulated manner.

- Introduced proteins could impact on metabolic pathways, eg overexpression or inhibition of enzymes.
- Fears of consumption of chemical in food would no longer be relieved to some extent by being able to wash them from food, because chemical capacity would be genetically-bound in the produce.
- GE material should not be fed to animals for human consumption.
- Glyphosate has been linked to Hodgkin's lymphoma and may be banned in Europe because it harms beneficial insects.
- Increased use of chemicals may worsen increasing rates of toxicity through water, soil and food.
- The increased nutrient in food may have unknown drawbacks such as affecting other nutrients.
- There should be a public review of the toxicity of chemicals entering the human and animal food supplies, taking cultural, ethical, social and age diversity into account.
- Establish an adverse reactions register to enable systematic monitoring of any impacts of these foods
- An updated public review of GE crops and Roundup Ready soy for environmental and health impacts.
- The need to consider diets, which include whole seeds for sprouting, uncooked in meals and cold, pressed in oils.
- Developers of such new technology are in no position to make no significant risks to human health claims. These are subjective statements.
- Approvals for GM foods should be deferred until a national coordinating system for regulatory approvals is in place so that a global assessment of their likely impact can be made.
- Australians need a Bill of Rights so that we can claim that "...no Australian may be subjected to experimentation without providing informed consent...".
- Serious liability implications in relation to this technology should also be explored.
- ANZFA's claim that a new food is at least as safe as existing food is not reassuring at all since the quality of conventional foods is declining in both safety and nutritional value.
- Symptoms presented at doctors surgeries may not be linked with GE foods at present but it is only a matter of time before science makes a connection.

17. Canberra Consumer

- Very concerned that Monsanto has not provided data to refute the work of Ewan and Pusztai on the observed adverse effects of feeding Monsanto's GM potatoes to rats.
- Also concerned that ANZFA has not taken into account the possible pleiotropic effects – ANZFA has looked at the potential toxicity and dietary intake of novel proteins and not the possible overall pleiotropic changes that may occur.
- No amino acid levels were given for A382. Why?
- Monsanto has not given any data on the levels of lectins in these three GM potato lines and no data is given on the levels of trypsin inhibitor in the GM potatoes.
- There is a statistically significant decrease in vitamin C and total protein and an increase in the ash content in the GM Superior potatoes in A382.
- A five day feeding study is insufficient time to give any meaningful results except for acute toxicity.

- For application A384, four animal feeding studies with Shepody potatoes are mentioned but were not assessed – why were these studies not included in the assessment?

GENERAL ISSUES RAISED IN PUBLIC COMMENT

The majority of submissions received in response to the Section 14 Gazette Notice, expressed general views against the use of gene technology and asserted that food produced using this technology is unsafe for human. A number of general issues were raised in these submissions and are addressed below.

1. The safety of genetically modified foods for human consumption

A majority of submitters raised the issue of public health and safety in relation to food produced using gene technology. In particular, it was stated that there has been inadequate testing of genetically modified foods, that there is limited knowledge concerning the risks associated with the technology and that there may be potential long-term risks associated with the consumption of such foods.

Evaluation

It is a reasonable expectation of the community that foods offered for sale are safe and wholesome. In this context, 'safe' means that there is a reasonable certainty of no harm. As with other aspects of human activity, the absolute safety of food consumption cannot be guaranteed. Conventionally produced foods, while having a long history of safe use, are associated with human disease and carry a level of risk which must be balanced against the health benefits of a nutritious and varied diet.

Because the use of gene technology in food production is relatively new, and a long history of safe use of these foods has yet to be established, it is appropriate that a cautious approach is taken to the introduction of these foods onto the market. The purpose of the pre-market assessment of a food produced using gene technology under Standard A18 is to establish that the new food is at least as safe as existing foods. The comprehensive nature of the scientific safety assessment, undertaken on a case-by-case basis, for each new modification is reflective of this cautious approach.

The safety assessment focuses on the new gene product(s), including intentional and unintentional effects of the genetic modification, its properties including potential allergenicity, toxicity, compositional differences in the food and its history of use as a food or food product.

Foods produced using gene technology are assessed in part by a comparison with commonly consumed foods that are already regarded as safe. This concept has been adopted by both the World Health Organisation (WHO)/Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The Authority has developed detailed procedures for the safety assessment of foods produced using gene technology that are consistent with international protocols developed by these bodies.

2. The need for long-term feeding studies

A number of submissions were concerned about the lack of long-term toxicity studies on genetically modified foods.

Evaluation

Animal studies are a major element in the safety assessment of many compounds, including pesticides, pharmaceuticals, industrial chemicals and food additives. In most cases, the test substance is well characterised, of known purity and of no nutritional value, and human exposure is generally low. It is therefore relatively straightforward to feed such compounds to animals at a range of doses (some several orders of magnitude above expected human exposure levels) in order to identify any potential adverse effects. Establishing a dose-response relationship is a pivotal step in toxicological testing. By determining the level of exposure at which no adverse effects occur, a safe level of exposure for humans can be established which includes appropriate safety factors.

By contrast, foods are complex mixtures of compounds characterised by wide variations in composition and nutritional value. Due to their bulk, they can usually be fed to animals only at low multiples of the amounts that might be present in the human diet. Therefore, in most cases, it is not possible to conduct dose-response experiments for foods in the same way that these experiments are conducted for chemicals. In addition, a key factor to be considered in conducting animal studies on foods is the need to maintain the nutritional value and balance of the diet. A diet that is poorly balanced will compromise the interpretation of any feeding study, since the effects observed will confound and usually override any small adverse effect which may be related to a component or components of the food. Identifying any potentially adverse effects and relating these to an individual component or characteristic of a food can, therefore, be extremely difficult. Another consideration in determining the need for animal studies is whether it is appropriate from an ethical standpoint to subject experimental animals to such a study if it is unlikely to produce meaningful information.

If there is a need to examine the safety of a newly-expressed protein in a genetically-modified food, it is more appropriate to examine the safety of this protein alone in an animal study rather than when it is part of a whole food. For newly-expressed proteins in genetically-modified foods, the acute toxicity is normally examined in experimental animals. In some cases, studies up to 14 days have also been performed. These can provide additional re-assurance that the proteins will have no adverse effects in humans when consumed as part of a food. Such experiments can provide more meaningful information than experiments on the whole food. Additional re-assurance regarding the safety of newly-expressed protein can be obtained by examining the digestibility of the new protein in *in vitro* assays using conditions which simulate the human gastric system.

3. *Substantial equivalence*

A number of submitters expressed concern regarding the use of the concept of substantial equivalence as part of the assessment process. Some rejected the premise of substantial equivalence on the grounds that differences at the DNA level make foods substantially different.

Evaluation

Substantial equivalence embodies the concept that, as part of the safety assessment of a genetically modified food, a comparison can be made in relation to the characteristics and properties between the new food and traditionally-produced food.

This can include physical characteristics and compositional factors, as well as an examination of the levels of naturally occurring allergens, toxins and anti-nutrients.

This allows the safety assessment to focus on any significant differences between the genetically modified food and its conventionally produced counterpart. Genotypic differences (i.e. differences at the DNA level) are not normally considered in a determination of substantial equivalence, if that difference does not significantly change the characteristics for composition of the new food relative to the conventional food.

The concept of substantial equivalence allows for an evaluation of the important constituents of a new food in a systematic manner while, recognizing that there is general acceptance that normally consumed food produced by conventional methods is regarded by the community as safe. It is important to note that, although a genetically modified food may be found to be different in composition to the traditional food, this in itself does not necessarily mean that the food is unsafe or nutritionally inadequate. Each food needs to be evaluated on an individual basis with regard to the significance of any changes in relation to its composition or to its properties.

The concept of substantial equivalence was first espoused by a 1991 Joint Consultation of the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) where it was noted that the *'comparison of a final product with one having an acceptable standard of safety provides an important element of safety assessment.'*

The concept has been internationally recognised and embraced as a valuable tool in the safety assessment of foods produced using gene technology. The OECD also advocates an approach to safety assessment based on substantial equivalence as being *'the most practical to address the safety of foods and food components derived through modern biotechnology.'*

4. *The nutritional value of food produced using gene technology*

A small number of submitters expressed concern that the genetic alteration of food decreases its nutritional value.

Evaluation

The assessment of food produced using gene technology by ANZFA entails an exhaustive evaluation of analytical data on any intentional or unintentional compositional changes to the food. This assessment encompasses the major constituents of the food (fat, protein, carbohydrate, fibre, ash and moisture) as well as the key nutrients (amino acids, vitamins, fatty acids). There is no evidence to suggest that genetic modification *per se* reduces the nutritional value of food.

In the future, genetic modification may be used intentionally to improve the nutritional value of food. In this regard, GM foods may be able to assist in addressing the general nutritional needs of the community and also specific dietary needs of sub-populations.

5. *Potential toxins and allergens*

Some submitters expressed concerns about the risks of the introduction of new toxins or allergens.

Evaluation

This issue is considered in detail as part of the safety assessment conducted on each new genetic modification applied to a food or commodity crop. New toxins or allergens may be introduced into food by either gene technology or by traditional breeding techniques, or by altered production processes. It is also possible to use these techniques to develop foods specifically where such compounds are significantly reduced or eliminated. One advantage of gene technology, in comparison with these other methods, is that any transferred genes are well characterised and defined, thus the possibility of developing a food with a new toxic or allergenic compound is likely to be reduced.

6. Antibiotic resistance

Some submitters raised concerns about increased antibiotic resistance resulting from the use of gene technology. Some felt that it would be reassuring if independent biomedical advice were available to reassure the public that the use of antibiotic resistance markers does not pose a risk to the future use of antibiotics in the management of human disease.

Evaluation

The human health considerations in relation to the potential for the development of antibiotic resistance depend on the nature of the novel genes and must be assessed on a case-by case basis. This issue arises because of the use of antibiotic resistance marker genes in the generation of genetically modified plants. In some circumstances, antibiotic resistance genes are linked to the gene of interest, to enable the initial selection of the engineered cells in the laboratory. Those cells that contain the antibiotic resistance marker gene, and hence the gene of interest, will be able to grow in the presence of the antibiotic. Those cells that failed the transformation process are eliminated during the selection procedure.

Concern has arisen that ingestion of food containing copies of antibiotic resistance genes could facilitate the transfer of the gene to bacteria inhabiting the gut of animals and humans. It is argued that these genes may then be transferred to disease causing bacteria and that this would compromise the therapeutic use of these antibiotics.

In 1993, the World Health Organisation Food Safety Unit considered this issue at a Workshop on the health aspects of marker genes in genetically modified plants. It was concluded at that Workshop that the potential for such gene transfers is effectively zero, given the complexity of the steps required. Since this time, several separate expert panels (Report to the Nordic Council, Copenhagen 1996; Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes, UK 1994, 1996; The Royal Society, UK 1998) and numerous scientific papers published in peer reviewed journals have also considered the available evidence on this issue. It is generally agreed that the presence and subsequent transfer of an intact functional gene from transgenic food to micro-organisms in the human intestine is an extremely unlikely event. Furthermore, if this were to occur, bacteria would not normally retain the resistance genes unless there was an environment for positive selection. The majority of these genes provide for resistance to antibiotics whose use is confined to the laboratory and are not considered to be of major therapeutic use in humans.

Antibiotic resistant bacteria are naturally occurring, ubiquitous and normally inhabit the gut of animals and humans.

There is a general consensus that the transfer of antibiotic resistance genes is much more likely to arise from this source and from associated medical practices, rather than from ingested genetically modified food. Even so, at the recent OECD Conference (GM Food Safety: Facts, Uncertainties, and Assessment) held in Edinburgh on 28 February – 1 March 2000, there was general consensus that the continued use of antibiotic marker genes in GM food crops is unnecessary given the existence of adequate alternatives, and should be phased out.

7. Transfer of novel genes

Some submitters have expressed concern that the transfer of any novel gene may be a health concern.

Evaluation

It is extremely unlikely that novel genetic material will transfer from GM foods to bacteria in the human digestive tract because of the number of complex and unlikely steps that would need to take place consecutively. It is equally unlikely that novel genetic material will transfer from GM foods to human cells via the digestive tract. In considering the potential impact on human health, it is important to note that humans have always consumed large amounts of DNA as a normal component of food and there is no evidence that this consumption has had any adverse effect on human health. Furthermore, current scientific knowledge has not revealed any DNA sequences from ingested foods that have been incorporated into human DNA. Novel DNA sequences in GM foods comprise only a minute fraction of the total DNA in the food (generally less than 0.01%) and are therefore unlikely to pose any special additional risks compared with the large amount of DNA naturally present in all foods.

8. Viral recombination

Some submitters expressed concern about the long term effects of transferring viral sequences to plants.

Evaluation

This is an issue that is commonly raised because some of the genes that are transferred to plants use a plant virus promoter. Promoters are controlling DNA sequences which act like a switch and enable the transferred genes to be expressed (i.e. to give rise to a protein product) in a plant cell. The routine use of these viral promoters is often confused with research which has shown that plant virus genes, which have been transferred into plants to render them virus-resistant, may recombine with related plant viruses that subsequently infect the plant, creating new viral variants. This research demonstrates that there may be a greater risk to the environment if viral genes are transferred to plants because it may lead to the generation of new plant virus variants capable of infecting a broader range of plants. This is a matter that will be addressed by the Genetic Manipulation Advisory Committee (GMAC) on a case-by-case basis when it assesses such plants.

However, the presence of plant viruses, plant virus genes or plant virus segments in food is not considered to pose any greater risk to human health as plant viruses are ubiquitous in nature and are commonly found in food eaten by animals and humans. Plant viruses are also biologically incapable of naturally infecting human or animal cells.

9. Labelling of foods produced using gene technology

A majority of submissions focussed on this issue. Specifically, the submissions called for the labelling of all foods produced using gene technology, regardless of whether they are substantially equivalent to conventional foods. The submitters based their demands for full labelling on the presumption that all foods produced using gene technology are unsafe and on consumer “right to know” arguments. It was stated that full labelling was the only means of identification of foods produced using gene technology available to consumers.

Evaluation

The existing Standard A18 already makes provision for mandatory labelling of genetically modified foods that are substantially different from their conventional counterparts. On 28 July 2000 the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Council agreed to an amendment to Standard A18 that will require labelling of GM food where novel DNA and/or protein is present in the final food and also where the food has altered characteristics. The amended Standard was gazetted on 7 December 2000 and will come into effect 12 months after this date.

10. The need for post marketing surveillance of genetically modified foods

A number of submitters have commented on the need for post-market surveillance of genetically modified food consumption.

Evaluation

Surveillance of potential adverse or beneficial effects of GM foods is seen by many as a logical follow-up to the initial scientific risk assessment. Nevertheless, it is recognised that there are limitations to the application of epidemiology studies, particularly in relation to food components. A key requirement for post-market surveillance systems is that a clear hypothesis be identified for testing. Establishing a system for the surveillance of potential health effects of exposure to novel foods requires monitoring of the consumption patterns of novel foods in the population, and health effects in both “exposed” and “non-exposed” individuals/populations, so that risk estimates can be derived. For any such monitoring system to be useful, there needs to be a range of exposures, otherwise, any variation in health outcome would be unexplainable by that exposure. Variations in exposure could be apparent over time (temporal trends), space (geographical trends) or both.

Availability of robust data on consumption of the foods in question is vital in order to establish a surveillance system. The other side of the equation is the need for access to data on population health outcomes. Such a system could also be used to identify potential positive health outcomes, such as improved nutritional status or lower cholesterol levels. The availability of linked basic data (e.g. date of birth, sex, geographical location), and the ability to correlate with demographic data, could potentially offer the means of establishing links with food consumption.

The possibility of setting up a post-market health surveillance system for novel foods, including GM foods, has been examined by the UK's Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes (ACNFP). Recognising the many difficulties involved in developing such a system, an initial feasibility study to look at the available data and its usefulness has been proposed. Work is currently being commissioned; when completed in 18 months, it will be subject to peer review. If such a feasibility study suggests that post-market surveillance is practical, methods and details concerning data collection will be determined in the UK, but common strategies might be able to be harmonised internationally in order to minimise the use of resources while maximising the reliability of the final results. This is an area that ANZFA will be monitoring closely, along with international regulatory bodies such as the OECD Taskforce for the Safety of Novel Foods and Feeds.

11. *Public consultation and information about gene technology*

A number of submitters were concerned that the public has not been properly consulted or informed by government or ANZFA on the introduction of foods produced using gene technology. Some submitters urged to undertake wider consultation with all affected parties including growers, the food industry and consumers before these food commodities are introduced, and to ensure that adequate consultation is undertaken as part of its assessment process.

Evaluation

The issue of gene technology and its use in food has been under consideration in Australia since 1992. The Agreement between the Governments of Australia and New Zealand for a joint food standard setting system, however, did not occur until 1995, and the New Zealand community therefore had not been consulted on this matter by the Authority until after that time. Consequently, the proposed standard (the current Standard A18) underwent only one round of public comment in New Zealand at which time significant objections were raised by the New Zealand community to the use of gene technology in food production. Many New Zealand consumers, both in these submissions, and in previous submissions to the Authority, have expressed the view that there has been insufficient consultation and a consistent lack of information about gene technology.

Although Standard A18 came into force in May 1999, the public have a continuous and ongoing opportunity to provide comment in relation to applications under the standard. ANZFA's statutory process for all applications to amend the *Food Standards Code* normally involves two rounds of public comment. Furthermore, all the documentation (except for commercial in confidence information) relating to these applications is available in the public domain, including the safety assessment reports. There is ample evidence that the provision of such information by ANZFA has already significantly stimulated public debate on this matter.

In addition, other government departments including the Environmental Risk Management Authority (ERMA), are potential sources of information about gene technology available to consumers in New Zealand. ERMA is a statutory authority set up by the New Zealand Government to administer the *Hazardous Substances and New Organisms (HSNO) Act 1996*, and has responsibility for assessing the risks to the environment from genetically modified organisms. This body has been assessing applications for the approval of genetically modified organisms since July 1998 and this has involved a number of public meetings.

12. Maori beliefs and values

Some New Zealand submitters stated that Maori people find genetic engineering in conflict with their beliefs and values and that, out of respect to Maori, no genetically modified foods should be allowed into New Zealand until a wider discussion, both within Maori and non-Maori, is held.

Evaluation

This issue was also raised during consideration of the proposal for the establishment of Standard A18. At that time, it was stated that the likely implications for Maori regarding genetically modified organisms surround the issues of the rights of Maori to the genetic material from flora and fauna indigenous to New Zealand and the release into the environment of genetically modified organisms. The *HSNO Act 1996* requires that these matters be considered by ERMA.

13. Environmental concerns and the broader regulatory framework

A number of submitters have raised concerns that genetically modified crops may pose a risk to the environment.

Evaluation

These issues are considered in the assessment processes of GMAC in Australia and the Environmental Risk Management Authority (ERMA) in New Zealand. The Authority does not have the mandate to assess matters relating to environmental risks resulting from the release of food produced using gene technology into the environment. However, links exist between ANZFA and other regulatory agencies in both Australia and New Zealand, and a large degree of information sharing occurs. ANZFA would not recommend the approval of a food produced using gene technology if the genetically modified organism from which it was derived did not have the appropriate clearance for general release from either GMAC (or its successor) or ERMA, as appropriate.

The regulatory system in Australia will comprise the existing regulators with a legal remit to cover some aspects of GM products (such as imports, food, agricultural and veterinary chemicals):

- the Australia New Zealand Food Authority (ANZFA)
- the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA)
- the National Registration Authority for Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals (NRA)
- the National Industrial Chemicals Notification and Assessment Scheme (NICNAS)
- the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS).

Similarly, various other departments and agencies play their role in the regulatory process in New Zealand:

- the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF)
- the Ministry of Health (MoH)
- the Ministry of Research, Science and Technology (MoRST)

In Australia, a new Office of the Gene Technology Regulator (OGTR) will complement the existing arrangements. OGTR will supersede the existing arrangements under the Genetic Manipulation Advisory Committee (GMAC), which advises on research and environmental release of GMOs. OGTR will regulate all GMOs and any 'gap' products (i.e. products for which no other regulator has responsibility).

All GM food is assessed and regulated by the Australia New Zealand Food Authority (ANZFA) under the direction of Commonwealth, State and Territories Health Ministers and the New Zealand Health Minister, sitting as Australia New Zealand Food Standards Council (ANZFSC).

There will be an interface between ANZFA and OGTR. Consequential amendments proposed to the ANZFA Act arising from the draft Gene Technology Bill 2000 will establish a statutory interface between OGTR and ANZFA. This will involve amendments to the ANZFA Act requiring the Authority to advise OGTR of recommendations to ANZFSC regarding the standard for foods produced using gene technology (currently Standard A 18).

14. Maximum residue levels of agriculture/veterinary chemicals

A number of submitters have raised concerns that residues of agricultural and veterinary chemicals in genetically modified (e.g. herbicide tolerant) crops may pose a health risk.

Residues of these chemicals can only legally be present if the chemical has been registered for use in Australia and/or New Zealand, and it has been demonstrated that the residue at specified levels does not lead to adverse health impacts. The concentration of a chemical residue that may be present in a food is regulated through maximum residue limits (MRLs). The MRL is the highest residue concentration that is legally permitted in the food. Food products have to meet the MRL, whether or not they are derived from genetically modified organisms. The MRL does not indicate the chemical residue level that is always present in a food, but it does indicate the highest residue level that could result from the registered conditions of use.

It is important to note that MRLs are not direct public health and safety limits but rather, are primarily indicators of appropriate chemical usage. MRLs are always set at levels lower than, and normally very much lower than, the health and safety limits. The MRL is determined following a comprehensive evaluation of scientific studies on chemistry, metabolism, analytical methods and residue levels. In Australia, the National Registration Authority (NRA) applies to ANZFA to amend the MRLs in the Food Standards Code and the application is considered by ANZFA through its legislated decision making processes. In New Zealand MRLs are set by the Ministry of Health, generally following a request from, and in collaboration with, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. Only following demonstration that the use of agricultural and veterinary chemicals will not result in unsafe residues will the MRL enter into food law through its inclusion in either the *Food Standards Code* in Australia, or the Food Regulations (1984) in New Zealand.