

Bid to test GM maize in SA gets thumbs down

By Environment Writer

The government has turned down an application by multi-national Dow Agrosciences to test its genetically modified (GM) maize in South Africa.

The anti-GM lobby group African Centre for Biosafety, which objected to the application, welcomed the decision, saying it was "outrageous" that a foreign company had tried to use SA as a "guinea pig" to test its products for release in Europe.

The organisation said yesterday it had lodged an objection seven months ago with the Department of Agriculture.

One of the reasons the application was turned down was because of the potential impact of the pest-resistant GM maize on non-target organisms.

Dow had said in papers lodged to support its application that the reason it wanted to run field trials of GM maize in South Africa was to "gather information to substantiate European Union registrations".

The European Commission is to consider Dow's application for safety approval of its GM maize, TC1507, this year.

Mariam Mayet, director of the Centre for Biosafety, said her organisation had questioned the veracity of the information Dow had supplied.

"(We) raised extensive environmental concerns, including the failure by Dow to address the impacts of GM maize on non-target species, the emergence of superweeds and the persistence of toxins."

Mayet said the UK had turned down an application by Dow to approve the GM maize last year.

"We are particularly concerned about the experimentation taking place in the fields in South Africa with GM maize and GM cotton crops by multi-national companies seeking nurseries in the southern hemisphere for the production of GM seeds for export to the United States," Mayet said.

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