

## **05/01/05 - Trans-Atlantic GMO contamination blunder not safe**

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Agro-chemical giant Syngenta has been accused of misleading governments and the public following the recent disclosure it had been trading unapproved genetically modified corn for the past four years.

Although the GMO producer claimed that the corn in question, named Bt10, was identical to approved product Bt11 when their blunder was uncovered last week, it has emerged that Bt10 contains a gene which confers resistance to an important group of antibiotics, making it unfit for human consumption.

Syngenta has now admitted that Bt10 does contain this gene, which is not present in the approved GMO, and that the two are not identical.

The use of antibiotic resistant genes has been widely condemned by eminent bodies such as the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation, the Royal Society and the Pasteur Institute, all of who are concerned that the genes could flow from crops to micro-organisms and spread problems of anti-biotic resistance in both humans and animals.

"Governments around the world have been taken in by Syngenta's attempt to play down the real scale of their huge error," GM campaigner for Friends of the Earth, Adrian Bebb said in response to the news.

"In view of this new information, the European Commission must take immediate action to ensure that foods which aren't permitted for human consumption are removed from the food chain."

In the UK, a spokesperson for Defra said that although the unapproved GMO could have contaminated UK corn stocks, it did not present a huge threat to the public as Bt10 would only have been present in animal feed.

But Liberal Democrat Shadow Agriculture Secretary Andrew George said that it was about time Defra implemented a tight system of controls to prevent such an event from occurring again.

"The Government should be able to guarantee genuine consumer choice so people can avoid eating GM food if they wish, but the fact is that Ministers simply don't know how many unapproved or experimental GM products are unwittingly getting on to our plates," Mr George stated.

"This news will only raise further suspicions among consumers. The Government and biotech companies need to provide robust reassurance and confidence in traceability and labelling."