# NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

**FOR WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION NO. 2650**

**DATE OF PUBLICATION IN INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER: 31 JULY 2015**

**(INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER NO. 26)**

**Ms S J Nkomo (IFP) to ask the Minister of Health:**

(1) Whether his department has commissioned any studies on the safety of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) currently present in the majority of maize crops in the country;

(2) whether foodstuffs that contain GMOs are safe to eat; if so, what are the full relevant details?

###### NW3058E

**REPLY:**

1. The Department of Health has not commissioned any studies on the safety of genetically modified organisms (GMOs). However, the Department participates in the regulatory systems of GMOs.

The safety of Genetically Modified Organisms is regulated in terms of the Genetically Modified Organisms Act, 1997 (Act No. 15 of 1997), (GMO Act), which is administered by the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF). The GMO Act provides for safety of human and animal health, as well as the environment. There are specific regulatory systems which have been set up for the rigorous evaluation of GMOs and Genetically Modified foodstuffs, so as to ensure access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food. These regulatory systems evaluate both human health and the impact that these organisms may have. The regulatory system consists of scientists, including food safety experts, who conduct food safety assessments before the GMO crops are approved for human consumption. The Department of Health participates in this regulatory system which also focuses on risk assessments of GMOs.

1. All GMO foodstuffs approved by government are safe to eat.

All foodstuffs from GMOs are thoroughly assessed during the developmental phase to ensure that they are safe for animal and human consumption. This is done before they are made available to the public. The safety assessments of Genetically Modified foodstuffs are based on guidelines and principles developed by Codex Alimentarius Commission (Codex), an international body involved in food safety, under the World Health Organization (WHO) and Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations. The Codex guidelines and principles include the need for a case-by-case safety assessment, i.e., the use of scientific risk-based assessment methods that would take into consideration the newly introduced genetic material in crops, including new proteins and other characteristics of the Genetically Modified foodstuffs. This is also done in comparison with conventionally produced foods. All the Genetically Modified foodstuffs that are on the market have been approved by government and are considered as safe as their conventional counterparts.

The details of all the GMOs approved in South Africa are as a result of the safety assessment by scientists who are experts in fields related to GMOs as appointed by the Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, in terms of the GMO Act and evaluate risk assessments (scientific data relating to food, feed and environmental impact). The decisions for approval are by the Executive Council, which consists of officials from six government departments responsible for matters relating to Agriculture, Health, the Environment, Labour, Trade and Industry and Science and Technology, as well as the chairperson of the Advisory Committee.

END.