

Attachment A

SA's GM maize crop is linked to cancer

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GENETICALLY modified maize approved for human consumption in South Africa has been linked to liver and kidney damage.

GM watchdog environmental group Biowatch South Africa says it supports Greenpeace International's call for a complete withdrawal of the maize, known as MON863, from the global market.

The study, commissioned by Greenpeace, was carried out by French researchers from the Committee for Independent Research and Genetic Engineering.

The team fed the maize to rats for three months and found signs of toxicity in their liver and kidneys.

It also found differences in weight gain between male and female rats as a result of eating the maize.

The maize was developed by United States biotech company Monsanto and approved for human consumption by the European Union last year.

Magda du Toit, spokeswoman for Monsanto South Africa, said MON863 was maize that had been genetically modified to kill root-worm, but was not used in South Africa because root-worm was not a maize pest here.

Instead they used a product called Yieldgard, the MON810 registration for stalk borers.

She added that five independent experts had reviewed the data and con-

firmed that MON863 maize did not adversely affect the health of rats.

But Leslie Liddell, Biowatch South Africa director, said the South African regulatory authorities had approved MON863 maize for use in food or feed or processing in 2003.

She said Biowatch wanted the government to undertake an urgent re-assessment of all other authorised GM products and a strict review of current methods of testing the safety of genetically modified crops.

Liddell said Biowatch South Africa had consistently tried to get access to information about how GM crop applications were approved. "We were forced to apply for this access to the Pretoria High Court."

She said their analysis of the documents indicated that GM crop applicants were largely taken at their word in terms of the safety of their products.

Liddell said a written reply from the Minister of Agriculture to a parliamentary question last October found that of the 1 133 GM crop applications approved from 2000 to 2005, the regulatory authority evaluated only 71 risk assessments.

Liddell said they hoped the government would take note of the study.

Priscilla Tsotso Sehabe, spokeswoman for Agriculture Minister Lulu Xingwana, was not available for comment yesterday.

