RESPONSE TO PETITION

Prepare in English and French marking 'Original Text' or 'Translation'

PETITION NO.: **421-00137**

BY: **MS. MAY (SAANICH-GULF ISLANDS)**

DATE: **MARCH 24, 2016**

PRINT NAME OF SIGNATORY: **HONOURABLE JANE PHILPOTT**

Response by the Minister of Health

SIGNATURE
Minister or Parliamentary Secretary

SUBJECT

Genetic engineering

ORIGINAL TEXT

REPLY

The Government of Canada considers issues of food safety to be of the utmost importance. Canada has one of the most stringent and rigorous regulatory systems in the world. In fact, Canada was ranked first in food safety performance amongst 17 OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries, including the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, France and Japan in the 2014 World Ranking Food Safety Performance report produced by the Conference Board of Canada and released on November 20, 2014.

The safety of new products is carefully and cautiously assessed before they are made available to consumers. Novel agricultural plant products of biotechnology require three separate safety assessments and authorizations prior to commercial use. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) assesses the safety of the end product for release into the environment and for use as a livestock feed, while Health Canada assesses the safety for use as food and its effect on human health.

Under the *Food and Drugs Act*, Health Canada is responsible for provisions related to public health, food safety and nutrition, through the establishment of science-based policies and standards to ensure that all foods, including those that are genetically modified, or genetically engineered, are safe and nutritious. The Food and Drug Regulations (division 28 – Novel Foods) require that a notification be made to Health Canada by the company wanting to sell a novel food product (including genetically modified foods) prior to the marketing or advertising of the product. This pre-market notification ensures that the safety of each novel food is thoroughly assessed and verified using internationally agreed-upon guidelines, before it can enter the Canadian marketplace.

The full safety assessment of GM foods involves a rigorous scientific evaluation by Health Canada's scientific evaluators, who have expertise in molecular biology, toxicology, chemistry, nutritional sciences and microbiology. Scientists also supplement the information provided by the company with published data that is relevant to the product in question. Health Canada takes all the available evidence into account prior to making a final decision about the acceptability of a specific GM product.

Even after a product has been assessed and found to be safe, Health Canada takes any new information related to such products very seriously. Scientists in the department routinely review new information including both independent and peer-reviewed published studies when these become available. Health Canada has yet to find a study that would cause Departmental scientists to change their conclusions regarding any GM food product that has been assessed and authorized in Canada. Furthermore, the conclusions of Health Canada are consistent with similar findings by regulatory scientists internationally, as well as through independent scientific reviews. Whenever new information concerning the safety of GM foods arises, this new data is carefully reviewed. Should any risks or concerns be identified from the consumption of any GM food authorized in Canada, Health Canada and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency would take immediate and appropriate action to protect the health and safety of Canadians.

Health Canada can also require mandatory labelling for food products, including genetically engineered (GE) foods, where there are clear, scientifically established health risks, or significant nutritional changes that can be mitigated through labelling.

It is not mandatory to identify the method of production when genetic modification is used to develop a food. However, voluntary method-of-production labelling is allowed.

The National Standard of Canada Voluntary Labelling and Advertising of Foods That Are and Are Not Products of Genetic Engineering (the Standard) provides guidance on method-of-production labelling for GE foods. The Standard defines terms and sets out various criteria for making claims about whether or not a food contains ingredients that are products of genetic engineering. All labelling claims must be understandable, informative, not false or misleading, verifiable and compliant with all current Canadian regulations. The Standard can be viewed at www.tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca/ongc-cgsb/programme-program/normes-standards/internet/032-0315/index-eng.html.

Several organizations participated in developing the Standard. These include consumer groups, food manufacturers, grocery distributors, provincial representatives and farm organizations, as well as federal government departments and agencies.

The Government of Canada's approach to the labelling of GE food products is supported by positions expressed previously by the Royal Society of Canada Expert Panel on the Future of Food Biotechnology; the Canadian Biotechnology Advisory Committee; the House of Commons Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food; and the

Codex Alimentarius, the international food standards body within the United Nations system where this issue has received significant consideration over the past number of years. In 2011, the Codex Alimentarius Commission adopted a compilation of existing Codex texts that provide guidance for the labelling of foods, including those derived from modern biotechnology. Canada's approach is consistent with this guidance.