

Zimbabwe imports almost 121,000 tons of GM maize illegally

Zimbabwe imported nearly 121 000 metric tonnes of genetically modified (GM) maize from South Africa between February and July this year, in contravention of the country's own biosafety laws, The Herald Business can reveal. The grain — enough to feed Zimbabwe's 13 million citizens for an entire month — was mainly for food and processing. Statistics obtained by this paper from South Africa's Department of Agriculture show that the imports were by three non-governmental organisations, Louis Dreyfus, Toepfer International and GAPS.

It is unlikely in the melee of emergency food aid necessitated by Zimbabwe's chronic food shortages in recent years, the grain was clearly labelled "GMO", for consumer purposes. It also remains unclear how the imports passed through border control without detection. Government has publicly stated its policy against the use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) for food, seed, animal feed or processing.

Zimbabwe's persistent shortages of food in the past decade have seen numerous non-governmental organisations and the private sector coming to the rescue of hungry villagers. This has opened the food industry to possible manipulation, increasing the risk of GM imports, as a last gap measure to avert hunger. At least 2,2 million people were estimated to be in need of food aid last year.

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