

## 2. PROTECTING INDIGENOUS WORLDVIEWS FROM GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS (GMOS) AND FREE TRADE AGREEMENTS TRADE AGREEMENTS

### INDIGENOUS WORLDVIEWS BELONG AT THE CENTRE, NOT THE MARGINS

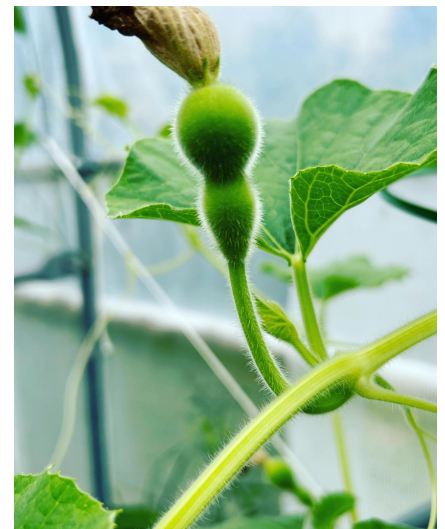
Indigenous Peoples' concerns over genetic engineering go to the very heart of our being - the protection of our spiritual relationships to the world around us, our duties and responsibilities to our ancestors and to generations yet to come, our cultural heritage and practices, control over our knowledge and resources, biodiversity and ecological integrity, the respect for our rights and self-determination. These values are common to Indigenous Peoples around the world - and why we object when genetic engineering risks the erosion and appropriation of our traditional crops and medicinal plants and undermining our cultural and spiritual heritage.

### THE CHALLENGE GMOS POSE FOR MĀORI

As Māori in Aotearoa, we have a deep connection to our land, culture, and traditional practices. For centuries, we have lived in harmony with the environment, relying on ancestral knowledge and practices to sustain our way of life. However, the advancement of genetic modification (GM) technologies poses potential threats to our cultural identity, traditional practices, and the delicate balance of nature.

### POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON CULTURAL IDENTITY

Māori culture is deeply rooted in the land, with a strong emphasis on the interconnection between people, nature, and the spiritual realm. The concept of whakapapa, or genealogy, plays a crucial role in Māori identity, tracing our lineage back to the ancestors and the natural world. Genetic modification, with its ability to manipulate and alter the genetic makeup of organisms, raises questions about the integrity of whakapapa and the preservation of ancestral connections. There is a fear that GM could disrupt the natural order and interfere with the sacred relationship between Māori and our environment.



*A hue budding. Photo source: Jessica Hutchings*

### POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON CULTURAL PRACTICES

Māori concerns over genetic modification extend to the potential impact on traditional rongoā Māori practices, such as traditional healing and the gathering of medicinal plants. These practices have a long history of using natural resources for healing purposes, relying on the wisdom passed down through generations. GM technologies, with their ability to create new organisms and alter natural processes, could threaten the availability and purity of these medicinal plants.

### HARM TO ECOSYSTEMS

As Māori, we have a deep connection to our lands and ecosystems. The introduction of genetically modified organisms into the environment could disrupt the delicate balance of nature, affecting the availability and sustainability of our traditional food sources, not just for our own livelihoods but also the well-being of future generations. Māori communities discuss this as maintaining the balance between tapu and noa and the natural order of whakapapa.

## **ETHICAL AND SPIRITUAL IMPLICATIONS**

As Māori, we have a deep respect for the sanctity of life and the tapu (sacredness) associated with all living beings. Genetic modification, with its manipulation of DNA and creation of new life forms, raises ethical questions about the boundaries of scientific intervention and the potential consequences of playing "god" with nature. For Māori, tampering with the genetic makeup of organisms may be seen as a violation of the spiritual principles that guide our relationship with the natural world.

## **INDIGENOUS OPPOSITION SOURCED IN PRINCIPLES**

The concerns raised by Māori regarding genetic modification are not simply opposition for opposition's sake. We have legitimate concerns regarding genetic modification and its potential impact on our cultural identity, traditional practices, and the delicate balance of nature. Preserving whakapapa, ensuring the availability of traditional healing practices, and upholding the spiritual principles that guide our relationship with the environment are all crucial to our identity.

## **THE UN DECLARATION AS AN INTERNATIONAL TOUCHSTONE**

Indigenous Peoples around the world are insisting on the importance of free, prior, and informed consent in any decision-making processes related to genetic engineering, and the right to be involved in decisions that affect our lands, resources, and traditional knowledge. The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples affirms all of that. It is essential that any discussions and decisions regarding genetic modification internationally respect and reflect Indigenous communities, our unique connection to the land and our role as stewards of the environment. Only through open dialogue and mutual respect can we navigate the complex intersection between science, culture, and the preservation of our natural world.

## **RANGATIRATANGA AND KAITIAKITANGA BENEFIT ALL OF AOTEAROA**

Māori perspectives on genetic modification remind us that cultural and spiritual values must not be overshadowed by western science and commercial interests. A holistic approach that is sourced in and respects all these elements, and is sourced in He Whakaputanga me Te Tiriti o Waitangi, can provide the foundations for a genuinely sustainable future.

## **WHAT TE TIRITI O WAITANGI GUARANTEES**

Rangatiratanga over taonga katoa. Te Tiriti guarantees the continued authority of hapū over our taonga, to be exercised according to the tikanga that governs these relationships, duties and responsibilities. Tikanga itself is a fundamental taonga that is protected under article 4 of te Tiriti; even the Crown's courts are starting to recognise that. This is not a question of "rights". The protection and responsible exercise of rangatiratanga and kaitiakitanga are profound duties and responsibilities that Māori have to the past and the future. They cannot be waived – let alone signed away by the Crown that has the lesser, delegated authority of kāwanatanga.

## **CAN FREE TRADE AGREEMENTS DELIVER ON THIS?**

The simple answer is no. International free trade agreements are founded in western science, western religion, western assumptions of human's supremacy over nature, and western law; there is no space for an Indigenous worldview. They are negotiated in secret by the Crown, so we only find out if they open the door to GMOs after it is done. With the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (the TPPA) they opened the door just a crack. But a new agreement, or a new pro-GMO government, could lock open the door to GMOs and make it impossible to reverse. That's why we need to understand these risks and mobilise to stop that ever happening.