READING Practice 11th form

TYPE of reading: **SKIM-READING**
TEXT No.: **TEXT 5**

Choose the correct heading for each paragraph from the list of headings below:

1) Environmentalists' reaction
2) Differing yields in developing and "first" worlds
3) Increased yields in Bt cotton
4) Hong Kong government's "marketing" of GM foods
5) Legal implications
6) Reactions to GM cotton
7) Growing importance of GM foods
8) GM crops and viruses
9) Attitudes worldwide to GM foods
10) Supermarkets' policy

Divided opinions over genetically modified crops and foods

➢ *Heading №:*

A) Europeans tend to be skeptical about the consumption of genetically modified foods and there is strong consumer pressure, supported by the Green parties, to ban farmers from growing GM crops in the European Union (EU). However 5.5 million farmers worldwide, mainly in the US, Argentina, Canada and China, now grow GM crops covering more than 50 million hectares, an area the size of Spain. Other Asian countries such as India are enthusiastic and Indonesia is about to join the GM club, so despite the Europeans, GM crop growth is increasing globally.

➢ *Heading №:*

B) A recent British scientists' report emphasizes that inserting genes into plants is still a very inexact science, so unexpected biochemical side effects are possible, affecting foodstuffs and human consumers. Legally, GM companies have to demonstrate that their crops are "substantially equivalent" to the originals, but what does this mean? That they should contain the same nutrients? That they should look and smell similar? Scientists who not long ago dismissed public concerns as hysteria are now concurring with green consumer activists and advising tougher regulation.

➢ *Heading №:*

C) More consensus and definition is required on this controversial topic. Currently, it seems that most American consumers trust GM food producers and associated big businesses, whilst Europeans do not. Canadians are skeptical: their studies of cross pollinated "super strains" indicate problems such as potential super viruses. Dutch studies however, suggest that engineered sugar beet is friendlier to wildlife and less damaging to the environment: it needs less herbicide for the same yield, allowing more weed biomass and increased insects and spiders, which in turn feed increased birdlife. These results are significant, as European law states that GM crops may be banned if they can be proved to damage the environment.

➢ *Heading №:*

D) Attitudes to GM crops appear to depend on where one lives and what one does. Cotton farmers in South Africa are very enthusiastic, as their first GM cotton crop proved extremely successful, boosting yields by 50 - 90%. "Bt cotton" contains a gene for a bacterial toxin that kills their major pest, bollworms and reduces the need for pesticides. Growing GM cotton requires less labour time, an important factor in a region ravaged by HIV/AIDS. Bt cotton seed yield shows increases of up to 129%; unsurprisingly, use grew from only 0.1 per cent of farmers in 1997/98 to over 90 per cent by 2001/02. Opponents of GM crops claim that pests will develop resistance soon and that small farmers relying completely on the modified strain are particularly vulnerable to changes in market conditions.

➢ *Heading №:*

E) India is also pleased with its high relative yields of GM cotton and generally, yield increases in the developing world are turning out to be much higher than those of the 'first' world. It is understandable therefore, that developing countries are keen to embrace GM foods and farming methods, whilst many western farmers and consumers remain skeptical.

- *Heading №:*

F) Meanwhile, in Hong Kong, the government's leaflet, 'GM Food Newsletter', is annoying consumer activists and environmentalists. In the leaflet, a university biotechnology student explains to her mother that all GM foods are safety-assessed and are "as safe as their conventional counterparts". The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department says it was published "with a view to enhancing the knowledge of the public on GM food".

- *Heading №:*

G) Greenpeace call it "blatant pro-GM food propaganda" however, and claim "The government is pushing GM food safety whilst at the same time understating the potential risks". It adds the government's role is "to educate and inform the public, not to blatantly promote what is an unproven technology." Greenpeace do not believe that a reasonable system of pre-market safety assessments exists in Hong Kong and have been actively campaigning for the compulsory labelling of GM ingredients. The government argues that assessment is adequate enough to allay public fears and that labelling of GM foods should be voluntary.

- *Heading №:*

H) Park'n'Shop and Wellcome allow distribution of the GM newsletter, but a spokeswoman said this did not necessarily imply active approval of GM foods, adding they had previously helped the government deliver a series of education leaflets, posters and information on SARS and dengue fever. "Our policy on GM food is neutral" she said.

Suggested headings:

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