

Open air GM trials get the go ahead in England

This April, Farming Minister George Eustice gave consent to two outdoor trials in England – for a GM camelina that produces ‘fishy’ omega-3 oils and a GM blight-resistant potato. **GM Freeze objected to both trials**, on behalf of ourselves and 21 other organisations representing farmers, scientists, campaigners and charities.

With the potato trial we stressed the fact that there are already conventionally-bred blight-resistant potatoes available on the market. There is no market demand for GM potatoes by consumers or the potato processing industry. We also highlighted the use of antibiotic resistance markers which should have been grounds alone for refusing consent. Even if the likelihood of spreading resistance to kanamycin is low, the risk is totally unnecessary at a time when antimicrobial resistance around the world is reaching levels



Example of cabbage butterflies (pinned to insect boards) fed experimental diets 48 hours after emergence: butterfly with deformed wings (left panel, 100% EPA + DHA diet) compared to a butterfly with intact wings (right panel, control diet). Hickson, S.M. et al, 24 March 2016. PLOS ONE journal <http://dx.doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0152264.g001>

which threaten public health.

Objecting to the camelina trial we detailed a range of concerns, particularly the fact that it is misleading to suggest that an alternative source of omega-3 fatty acids will make fish farming sustainable. We also raised the potential for unexpected effects, which went on to be dramatically demonstrated by a new research study, published in Canada a few days after the deadline for trial objections.

Unexpected effects

The new research showed unexpected and damaging effects when cabbage white butterflies were fed the kinds of omega-3 oils that are produced by the GM camelina plants. The butterflies were more likely than control groups to grow heavier and to have deformed wings.

GM Freeze sent notice of this research to Defra’s Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment. It said

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Glypho-gate: the saga continues – but for how long?

Glyphosate is the active ingredient of the world’s top-selling pesticide RoundUp and its licence for use in the EU is up for renewal at the end of June. Glyphosate resistance is the most common GM trait in crops grown around the world and many of the GM crops that biotech companies would like to grow in Europe are designed to work alongside the herbicide. If glyphosate’s EU licence is not renewed, the threat of GM crops in our fields will be dealt a significant blow.

The European Commission had already indicated that it wanted to renew the licence for another 15 years without

imposing any substantial conditions. The European Parliament disagreed and in April passed a non-binding resolution in favour of a renewal of 7 years and bans on general use by the public and around parks, playgrounds and gardens.

However, debates about the safety of glyphosate have raged across the continent ever since glyphosate was deemed a probable human carcinogen by the WHO’s International Agency for Research on Cancer (Thin Ice 38). Glyphosate residues have been found in urine samples of people across Europe, including MEPs, and the Soil

Association has found residues in UK bread – all of which have raised concerns even further.

Two votes on the issue had already been postponed as no qualified majority of Members States could be found to vote in favour of re-approval. In May, the EU Standing Plant, Animal, Food and Feed Committee ended a two-day meeting with no vote over renewing the pesticide. This deadlock seems to be the result of months of negotiation between the Commission and Member States.

Sweden and Italy have come

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Moo-ving towards GM-free dairy feed

On 27 April leading US yoghurt maker **Dannon made a pledge** to use more natural ingredients, rejecting those that are synthetic or GM. Importantly for GM Freeze's *Feed: The Facts* campaign, Dannon also made a commitment that the cows that produce the milk in its products will be given non-GM feed within 3 years. The changes will start with the company's three flagship brands Dannon, Oikos and Danimals before expanding to its remaining brands over time.

Back on this side of the Atlantic, on 4 May **Lidl Germany** announced that all of its Milbona own-brand milk will be GM-feed-free from July of this year, saying it is "sending a clear signal against the use of GM feed in the production of dairy products". As well as milk products, the retailer's cream, whipped cream, cottage cheese, cr me fraiche, sour cream, mozzarella and cheeses will all be GM-free from August 2016. "We are very pleased that we can offer this to our customers at no extra

cost," said a Lidl Germany spokesperson. It has also set a target to convert all of its UHT milk products to GM-free feed by next year.

Farmer-owned Arla followed suit on 13 May, offering farmers incentives to convert to GM-free feed. Stressing the commercial focus of the decision, Arla Chairman  ke Hantoft said "We own the biggest organic milk pool in the world, for which the feed is by default GM-free. Our Swedish farmers have always used

GM-free feed. This means that around 20 per cent of Arla's milk pool already meets this market demand. There is commercial potential in this that we can capture and build on immediately by attracting more farmers who are willing to convert to GM-free feed."

The mainland European market seems increasingly willing to pay a price premium for a fully GM-free supply chain. Now we need to make sure the trend spreads to the UK.

■ TAKE ACTION

Consumer demand is clearly making an impact on retailers in the US and Germany. These announcements show it is possible to develop a plan for sourcing GM-free feed. We would like to see such moves replicated in the UK. Please write to the UK headquarters to congratulate their parent companies and call for similar measures for products sold in the UK.

Danone Dairy 3rd floor, International House, 7 High Street, London W5 5DW

Lidl UK GmbH 19 Worples Road, Wimbledon, London SW19 4JS

Arla Foods UK plc 4 Savannah Way, Leeds Valley Park, Leeds LS10 1AB

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that the research was "relevant and of interest" but that it "sees no reason to change its original advice", indicating that the small scale of the trial was a key factor in that judgement.

Liz O'Neill, Director of GM Freeze, believes that the new research is hugely significant.

"Farmers might initially welcome the idea of deformed cabbage whites but this is a totally unexpected effect and that should make everyone worry. We have no idea why the omega-3 oils harmed the butterflies in the Canadian study and until we do know, we shouldn't be genetically modifying plants to produce them."

Defra received fourteen public objections to both trials, in addition to the ones from GM Freeze and other organisations. We would like to thank those supporters who also sent in their own objections, which were a huge help towards demonstrating that public concern about GM has not gone away.

Media response

The last time Rothamsted Research grew GM camelina it issued press

releases at every stage of the trials, which gave us many opportunities to comment and to put forward the case against GM. This time around there was very little media interest at all.

There was some typical shouting from pro-GM campaigner Mark Lynas who dismissed the Canadian study. Rothamsted also made some

statements in defence of its trials. However they both stand accused by **GMWatch.org of using false or unproven arguments**. Regardless of how ignorant of the science Lynas may be, we were pleased to see that Rothamsted is taking the research more seriously, stating that they are in discussion with the report's authors.

THIN ICE SURVEY RESULTS

A big 'Thank you!' to all members and supporters who returned our paper or online *Thin Ice* survey forms in recent months. As a result many supporters will be pleased to hear that we will continue with the paper newsletter, focusing on the kind of stories and information you have told us you really want. We also know that many of our supporters do not have access to or do not use computers, so we will provide details of how to take action by post or telephone whenever we can. If you have a query about stories in *Thin Ice* contact Raoul on 0845 217 8992.

We will always try to accommodate people who prefer pen, paper and telephone. However, we must also recognise that emails, the internet and social media are increasingly the quickest, most effective and economical ways to reach large numbers of people quickly. This is particularly true with urgent actions on complex EU votes which can only be finalised with a few days to go.

We are expanding our social media presence with [@gmfreeze](#) on twitter and [a new page on Facebook](#) – do a search for GM Freeze and look out for our logo. Please encourage others to connect to help spread the word.

How a small US state is raising national standards

Two years ago in 2014, the small **American state of Vermont** passed a law requiring all GM food to be labelled by 1 July 2016. Needless to say the food industry leapt into action, with the Grocery Manufacturing Association (GMA) spending millions in support of the “DARK Act” which would have over-riden local state laws in favour of voluntary labelling standards. Fortunately this was blocked by the US Senate but the industry continues to fight the Vermont law in federal court.

Many food companies are already taking measures to comply with the Vermont law, just in case. As they don't want to label products separately for

one state, that means that products from companies including General Mills, Mars, Kellogg and ConAgra Foods are already appearing in shops with labels that declare the use of genetically modified ingredients. One company Dannon has gone a step further to say it will convert its dairy herd to GM-free feed (see page 2).

Campbell's, a GMA member, has stated, *“To be clear, there will be **no price increase** as a result of Vermont or national GMO labelling for Campbell products.”* So much for fear-mongering from Monsanto and the GMA, who said labelling would be costly and consumer prices would rise (see Lidl quote on p2).

Other news from the United States

In the past 2 years a few United States based food companies have decided to label their products as non-GM (see story left). For pastry, sweet and chocolate makers this has meant looking at where their sugar comes from. About half of all sugar in the US comes from sugar beet and the other half from sugar cane. So for **a company like Hershey's**, one of the top sugar users in the country, this has meant shifting their source from beet sugar to cane sugar. This is because practically all sugar beet in the US is GM whereas there is no GM sugar cane. Sugar beet farmers may be reluctant to switch back to non-GM beet but have said they will have to, if that's what the customer wants.

In addition to this, several of the US' top grain handlers have decided to **ban GM crops that are not approved** in all major overseas markets. Apparently this is a move to avoid a repeat of the turmoil in 2013 and 2014, when China rejected boatloads of US corn containing a Syngenta trait that had not been approved in China. Cargill and Archer Daniel Midland both said the rejection cost them millions of dollars and both have sued Syngenta for damages. As it is not easy to segregate crops containing unapproved traits, the grain handlers have decided it is *‘the safest thing for the supply chain’* to simply prevent those crops from coming into the handling stations. Bold yellow signs from global trader Bunge Ltd are posted at US grain elevators barring 19 varieties of GM corn and soybeans that lack approval in important markets. The EU is one such market. The latest crop being banned is Monsanto's RoundUp Ready 2 Xtend soybean which is resistant to both glyphosate and dicamba. The current debate on glyphosate underway in the EU will have Monsanto biting its knuckles.

MCINTYRE REPORT

A big thank you to all the GM Freeze supporters who took urgent online action to ask their MEPs to vote against a dangerous EU report promoting new genetic engineering techniques and other “technological solutions for sustainable agriculture”. The McIntyre report did go through, but with many of the worst sections removed. The votes on those points were tight so every email to an MEP made a real difference.

Syngenta attempts to patent conventionally-bred tomato

On 12 May a mass objection was filed against a patent on tomatoes with a higher content of compounds called flavonols held by the Swiss company Syngenta. The objection was signed by 65,000 individuals from 59 countries and 32 organisations. One of the objectors, **No Patents on Seeds**, claims that never before have so many people been involved in an opposition at the European Patent Office (EPO). They all oppose the Syngenta patent, which describes the invention as *“flavonol-expressing domesticated tomato and method of production”*. This means Syngenta is patenting perfectly natural common tomatoes, that will potentially grant them rights on every tomato, tomato seed and tomato plant with the same characteristics.

This so-called “invention” is simply a product of crossing tomatoes originally

from Peru and Chile with varieties currently grown in industrialised countries. European patent law is meant to prohibit patents on plant varieties and on conventional breeding. For this reason, the opponents want the patent to be revoked completely. All in all, around 1400 patent applications on conventional breeding have been filed at the EPO so far, and around 180 such patents have already been granted.

“This is an all-time record number of opponents involved in a case at the European Patent Office. The huge support for this opposition will send a very strong signal to European politicians to take much stronger action against patents on plants and animals,” said Iga Niznik, from Arche Noah in Austria, a member of the delegation that presented the objection.

Glyphosate

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out against the renewal. France has already announced that it will ban glyphosate regardless of the Commission's decision. "The president of the republic stated very clearly at the latest environmental conference that glyphosate would not be authorised in France," said Marisol Touraine, the French Minister for Health. "Quite apart from the debates on whether or not glyphosate is a carcinogen, we believe, and our studies show, that it is an endocrine disruptor."

On 24 May, **Germany's ruling coalition** announced it would not back a European renewal of glyphosate. German Environment Minister Barbara Hendricks said, "[We] have... decided to say NO over the re-approval of glyphosate, as long as the health risks are not fully clarified."

That same day, **Malta shifted position**. "In the absence of scientific consensus regarding glyphosate, Malta's original position was to abstain and recommended the possibility of implementing more stringent [sic] conditions in the licensing regimes at a national level," an Environment Ministry statement read. "Today, however, the

'STAGGERING LEVELS' OF GLYPHOSATE

The Portuguese **No GMO Coalition** commissioned an analysis of urine samples from 26 volunteers. Glyphosate residues were detected in 100% of samples. The coalition admits that the sample is small and doesn't allow for definitive results, but says it is enough to raise a red flag, particularly as there has been no official testing for the presence of glyphosate in food, soil, water (including drinking water) or air for over 10 years. If the Water Framework Directive is taken as a reference, then the average amount of glyphosate detected in the samples would contaminate drinking water 260 times over the maximum legal limit.

The Portuguese study adds to other surveys: in Switzerland in 2015 a similar programme detected glyphosate in 38% of cases and in 2013, sampling carried out by Friends of the Earth in 18 European countries showed 44% of the people to be contaminated. The Soil Association has also found the pesticide residue in UK bread.

Government has decided to further apply the precautionary principle and, therefore, Malta should vote against the renewal of such licences."

After further discussion the Commission proposed a temporary extension of 12-18 months which would allow time for the European Union's Agency for Chemical Products (ECHA) to complete its own assessment. On 6 June the Standing Committee again failed to get a qualified majority in favour of the proposal. The Commissioner has now referred this to the Appeal

Committee for a second vote on 23 June.

Commissioner Andriukaitis has **reminded Member States** "that once an active substance is approved – or renewed at EU level – it is then up to Member States to authorise the final products (the herbicides and pesticides themselves) put on their respective markets... The Member States who wish not to use glyphosate based products have the possibility to restrict their use. They do not need to hide behind the Commission's decision."

GM Freeze in the public eye

Surprisingly (given Rothamsted Research's penchant for PR) there has been very little press coverage of the two new GM trials, though GM Freeze's objections were noted in the *Ecologist*, *Horticulture Week* and trade title *Feed Navigator*.

In May, the US National Academies of Science published a report on GM that showed no increase in yield and highlighted concern about "**major agricultural problems**" caused by growing pest resistance in response to GM farming regimes. However the UK press focused almost exclusively on the headline notion that the report proved GM to be safe. We managed to redress the balance a little

when Director Liz O'Neill appeared on Talk Radio and BBC Three Counties highlighting a range of issues including the importance of social and ethical concerns about GM. Liz also debated the Scottish GM moratorium on BBC2 in Scotland.

Lack of media coverage or regulatory interest in the wider and more value-based issues around GM formed the main content for the written evidence we submitted to a House of Commons inquiry into Science Communication. You can read our evidence at www.gmfreeze.org/comms_inquiry and find our press releases, comments and GM Freeze press coverage at www.gmfreeze.org/press.

GM Freeze is working to help create a world in which our food is produced responsibly, fairly and sustainably. We consider and raise the profile of concerns about the impact of genetic modification. We inform, inspire, represent and support those who share our concerns. We campaign for a moratorium on GM food and farming in the UK. We oppose the patenting of genetic resources.

A referenced version of this newsletter is available online - <http://www.gmfreeze.org/thinice>

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