

Freeze Update



Planning of 'public debate' begins

Steering Board appointed

Plans for the implementation of the great GM 'public debate' have begun in earnest. A steering board has been appointed, on which Clare Devereux, Director of the Freeze, has been invited to sit. Other members are drawn mainly from the AEBC, with the addition of representatives from the biotech industry (Steve Smith from Syngenta /Agricultural Biotechnology Council), and DEFRA. The board will meet once a month, in public. Agendas, minutes etc will be posted on the dedicated 'public debate' website (see below).

By sitting on the Steering Board we hope to help create a process that is worthwhile – and contributes to decisions on the commercialisation of GM crops in the UK. We do not want to endorse any process that turns out to be a 'sham'. We will be constantly monitoring how things are progressing, and if we are not happy at any point will review our support for the process.

Future Steering Board Meetings

Thursday 7 November 2.30-5.00pm

Wednesday 20 November 2.30-5.00pm

Friday 6 December 10.30am - 1.00pm

Please check the new website www.gmpublicdebate.org.uk for updates of dates and venue

Central Office of Information

The first job of the steering board was to appoint a prime contractor for the process. Due to budgetary and time constraints, and EU tendering law, the only option on the table was the Central Office of Information (COI). This is far from ideal, as the COI is a Government agency, and for obvious reasons the debate must be carried out at arms length from Government. In addition to concerns

about independence, there are also questions about the COI's expertise in organising a 'debate' – their experience is after all in 'communications'. We will be monitoring carefully how this develops over the next few weeks.

Next steps

The first stage in the process will be a series of 'foundation discussion workshops', during which selected members of the public will frame the issues for debate. This is a crucial first step, which allows the public to set the agenda rather than it being determined by Government, or the COI, or any other party. Hopefully this will be completed by Christmas.

The second stage, the more 'visible' public debate, will begin in the New Year and wrap up around the end of April, allowing for a report to be written and delivered to Government by the June deadline. It is not clear yet what form the second stage will take, and where the opportunities for public and stakeholder involvement will be. The COI will be drawing up plans for this over the coming weeks.

Science and economics review

Two companion processes are also under way, a review of the economics to be undertaken by the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit (SU), and a review of the science by DEFRA. Both are intended to feed into the public debate.

The scoping note for the economics review is now available. This outlines the study and initial views on few costs and many potential benefits in the food chain, in relation to organic, conventional production, industry and the environment. It does not make great reading – and we are very disappointed with it as an initial framework. There is an invitation to submit views on

New Five Year Freeze briefing!

Feeding or Fooling the World – can GM food really feed the hungry?

The UK public is regularly faced with claims that GM crops have the potential to "feed the world", and that by opposing their acceptance in the UK, they are holding up research which could benefit the hungry in other parts of the world.

This timely briefing takes a critical look at the arguments put forward by the biotechnology industry and examines why GM isn't the solution the industry promotes it to be. It examines the key causes of world hunger and the reasons why hunger persists, explains the issues which need to be addressed to redress food poverty and highlights effective non-GM alternatives.

With evidence and experiences from developing countries, written with our development agency partners, this is a useful handbook on the issue. Copies will be sent to all Freeze members shortly. Contact the Freeze for additional hard copies, available at £5, and pdf versions available through the Freeze website.

STOP PRESS!

At the time of going to press European Environment and Agriculture Ministers are in discussion about tracability and labelling laws and potentially lifting the moratorium. The beginning of the week's discussions saw a great deal of divide and indecision. The discussion may go forward to the next Agriculture Ministers' meeting in November. We will report on the outcome in the next newsletter.

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A blow to democracy – changes to the national seed list hearings

In our last newsletter we reported that the government were planning to drastically reduce the public's ability to object to GM seed varieties going on the UK national seed list. DEFRA recently announced proposed changes to the Written Representations and Hearings provision to the 2001 Regulations on national lists of seed varieties, in light of its costly and time consuming experiences with Chardon LL. 60 people made oral representations at the Chardon LL hearing, which is possible under the current system. The hearing heard expert witnesses evaluate an Aventis study as "inadequate" and "not of a standard that would be acceptable for publication in a scientific journal". DEFRA believe that the current arrangements are "unsustainable" and several restrictive alternatives to the current system are being proposed. The right for such rigorous cross examination are at risk of being lost.

action...action...action

Please respond!

Deadline: 16th December

You can obtain a copy of the (8-page) consultation letter from the FREEZE or from the DEFRA website
<http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/nationalist>

Also, those of you who took part in the Chardon LL case please send us your 'testimonies' – a few brief lines on why the open oral system benefited the case, to add support our submission. Email:
rachel@fiveyearfreeze.org

Scottish Parliament asks for evidence on health impact of GM crops

The Health and Community Care Committee is asking for written evidence from interested parties on the following four areas: Precautionary principle regarding crop trial continuation, risk assessment, cross contamination and health monitoring.

action...action...action

Deadline for submitting evidence: 18th November 2002. Contact Anthony Jackson, Munloch Vigil Group for information on how to take action. Tel: 07720 817 847. Email:
munlochvigil@bopenworld.com

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this scoping note presented as a structured set of questions and we urge all Freeze members to have a look at this and make comments.

action...action...action

Consultation on the Strategy Unit's scoping document
COSTS AND BENEFITS OF GM CROPS.

Deadline: 25th October

A briefing sheet on how to comment is enclosed. The scoping document is available from www.strategy.gov.uk/2002/GM/attachments/scoping.pdf or email rachel@fiveyearfreeze.org

DEFRA is currently putting together the membership of the science review panel – and NGOs have been invited to contribute nominations to this. We are concerned that it also includes the Chairs of the four committees involved in decision making on GM crops in the UK – which compromises the supposed independence of the

Patents report published

Last month the (UK government established) Commission on Intellectual Property Rights: "Integrating Intellectual Property Rights and Development Policy" report was launched. The full report can be found at: www.iprcommission.org

In short, the report makes some useful points but does not recommend the abolition of TRIPS or for developed countries to make major changes to their patent regimes.

The report:

- Identifies the lack of capacity of developing countries to deal with IP;
- Cites the complexity of the issue and the need for diverse solutions;
- Does not address the fact that the balance of power is seriously skewed against developing countries;
- Developing countries could find it much more difficult to exclude plants and animals from patentability, in a global context where the most powerful nations (notably the US, the EU and Japan) allow it;

panel. It is also not known at this point whether they will meet in public.

In fact, it is clear that the economic and science review strands are not being carried out with the same commitment to openness and public involvement as the public debate strand, to the detriment of the whole process. Again, we urge Freeze supporters to comment and participate wherever and whenever the opportunities arise. More details of the science review are available and details of the proposed work of the panel are available at www.defra.gov.uk/environment/gm/debate/science/intro.htm.

Parallel events

However the process takes shape over the coming months, we encourage all Freeze supporters, both organisations and individuals, to think of ways to make a contribution to the debate. It is important that councils, local organisations, schools, campaigning groups, trade unions, take advantage of the opportunity presented by the debate to raise the issue and involve people locally. This may involve putting on an exhibition at local events, running a debate, staging a performance, holding public meetings – there are plenty of imaginative ways of bringing attention to the issue. We can offer help with ideas, materials, speakers – and want to hear about your ideas!

- Developing countries will also find it much harder to develop sui generis regimes for the protection of plant varieties and to avoid patenting them when the most powerful governments and corporations are doing so.

Perhaps most seriously is the fact that the report does not acknowledge that the patenting system is out of control. An ever increasing number of patents are being granted, many of them overlapping, too broad or in blatant contravention of basic patenting rules. Overturning these patents requires immense financial resources and years of work. There are serious contradictions within the system itself and between different jurisdictions, which may delay the process of granting patents, but also gives ruthless players ample opportunity to exploit resources in the short term. Any move to harmonise the system in the current context would almost certainly make things even worse for developing countries. It remains to be seen how the UK government deals with this report.

GM free Britain

Friends of the Earth explain why they are launching a GM-Free Britain campaign

A de facto moratorium on GM crop and import approvals has been in place across Europe for the last four years. This has provided a much needed breathing space to bring to light evidence on the likely impact of GM crops and foods. As a result of new research, the claims that GM technology in agriculture would be benign and beneficial are looking a bit thin.

The public have supported the call for a moratorium and the latest opinion polls indicate that they are not wavering in their opposition to GM food. Politicians in the EU have responded by strengthening legislation on crop safety, traceability and labelling.

The results of commercial growing of GM crops in the US and Canada, has confirmed that the Freeze's concerns were well founded. For example, cross pollination between non GM crops and GM crops appears to be common place and is already causing economic problems. Contamination has also occurred in the EU. Court actions by the biotech companies to ensure that their patents of genetic materials are not infringed by farmers are becoming more frequent. One of the Freeze's key concerns is the impact of patents on farmers. Biotech companies still refuse to accept liability for their products if they cause harm. In Canada

oilseed rape plants containing three different herbicide tolerant genes have been found.

Many of these problems were foreseen by the Freeze's initial statement of demands. Yet the issues of consumer choice, maintaining seed purity, contamination of honey, cross pollination, liability and lack of food/feed safety testing have had to be forced onto the Government's agenda.

Friends of the Earth has assessed the accumulation of evidence of problems and this has led us to the opinion that the current types of GM crops cannot coexist with our conventionally and organically farmed crops in the UK. We are therefore launching a campaign to make Britain GM free until such time that there is clear evidence that our knowledge of molecular biology can be used in a sustainable way to benefit current and future generations without harming the environment and health and undermining the already fragile rural economy. We believe that GM free is the only way forward for the UK at present and we need to build public and political support over the next 18 months to prevent the wrong decisions about GM crop commercialisation being made.

Please contact Liz Wright (lizw@foe.co.uk tel. 0113 424 8153) if you want to get involved in the FoE 'GM Free Britain' campaign, and use the window/car/door sticker enclosed!



'GM Dilemmas' - New report by Consumers Association

This summer CA carried out a public survey on attitudes to GM foods, and found that there is a serious mismatch between the governments' attitude and that of most of the public. Only 32% are in favour of GM crops being grown for commercial purposes in the UK. A briefing paper and the survey report can be downloaded in pdf from: www.which.net/campaigns/food/gm

"The government must take the corporate fingers out of its ears and start listening to what consumers really think about GM"

Sheila McKechnie, Director, Consumers' Association.

New supporters

We are pleased to announce three new Freeze supporters - the Scottish Beekeepers Association, Welsh Beekeepers Association and the Carmarthenshire Beekeepers Association have signed up to the Five Year Freeze Campaign!

The plight of the humble bee.....

In September the British Beekeeping Association held a conference on *GM Crops, Beekeeping and the Honey Industry*. Beekeeping associations, industry representatives and the FSA were among the delegates discussing issues around the commercialisation of GM crops in the UK. It attracted criticism for the lack of public interest groups invited to the conference, particularly as the issue of definitions of GM free honey was an item for discussion.

Beekeepers were not consulted about the location of Farm Scale Evaluation (FSE) sites, and throughout the course of the FSE's concerned bee keepers have gone to great trouble and expense to move their hives away from FSE sites in order to prevent genetic pollution of pollen and honey products.

As an outcome of the conference the BBKA recommended that a six mile exclusion zone should be maintained "for the meantime". However, more worrying is the BBKA's chairman statement 'Much needs to be done to reassure and convince the public of the benefits and safety of GM crops', suggesting that the BBKA is not aware of the impact on beekeepers.

A conference attendee gives his feedback on the days discussions: "This conference attracted a good deal of criticism for having no representatives from consumer, whole food trade or the organic movement or any qualified scientists holding views contrary to the industry line. Because of pressure from other interested groups, BBKA has promised to schedule another conference to present the arguments against GM. A

major concern is that some members of the BBKA executive appeared to support the industry line, foresaw no potential dangers and wanted to abandon the 6-mile limit. I would not care to suggest that they are being unduly influenced by biotech corporations, but when I proposed that we were being pressured into accepting commercialisation of GM and should wait at least 25 years for long-term research results, a former chairman of the technical committee replied that this could be 'too late'. Too late for biotech companies to make a killing in the UK market? Too late for what? He did not comment further. While the industry repeatedly asserted that GM is safe for both bees and people, no independent research was cited."

Phil Chandler, participated at the conference, representing the Devon Beekeepers Association.

New report shows GM crops in the USA are an economic disaster

With UK farmers potentially being able to plant GM crops in a couple of years, strong words of warning come from Hugh Warwick, co-author of the new Soil Association report.

The Soil Association's latest report was always going to create waves. 'Seeds of Doubt' is a detailed look at the experiences of farmers in North America in the six years since GM crops were first grown commercially.

While the story repeated most frequently in the press is that everything is rosy in the home of GM, this report begins to dismantle many of the biotech industry myths. For example, we all know that GM crops increase yields, reduce agrochemical use and generate greater profits for farmers...at least that is what we are told is true. But by speaking to farmers who have actually experienced the disasters that can accompany this new technology, a very different picture emerged.

Yields have gone down, agrochemical use has increased and profits have simply not materialised as any benefits there might be are sucked up in the higher costs of the seeds. Between 1999 and 2001 GM crops have cost the US economy and estimated \$12 billion.

You might expect the Soil Association to say this – and this has been the line that many GM proponents have taken in trying to combat the report. But while Seeds of Doubt was at the printers a document appeared from the US Department of Agriculture. 'Adoption of bioengineered crops'(see www.ers.usda.gov/publications/aer.810)

was published in May this year, but did not get massive coverage. The report states:

- "The adoption of herbicide-tolerant soybeans did not have a significant impact on net farm returns in either 1997 or 1998."
- "adoption of Bt corn had a negative impact on net returns among specialised corn farms."
- "The pounds of active ingredients applied to soybeans increased slightly, as glyphosate was substituted for other synthetic herbicides."

Evidence that GM crops are a potential disaster to the farming economy is emerging. And if the UK wants to follow in the footsteps of the United States, then there is a final warning in the Soil Association report.

For copies contact SA on 0117 929 0661 or as pdf on www.soilassociation.org/sa/saweb.nsf/getinvolved/geneng.html

This season's seed sale!!

Hooked on GM crops, but can't yet see the economic gain?
Tied into a seed contract you can't escape?

Dazzling reductions this season for farmers: Bt Corn down from \$24 to \$9.50 per bag! Bt plus Roundup Ready reduced from \$42 to \$22!

Source: Last Word, August, American Corn Growers Association

Offer applicable to Iowa farmers only (for this season)

At a glance - Dates for your diary:

Oct 25th	Deadline for responses to the Strategy Units 'Costs and benefits of GM crops'
Oct 31st	Sir Andrews Prize for the Environment Lecture, John Krebs, London. For tickets call 0207 409 2992
Nov 7th	2:30-5, Governments Public Debate Steering Group meeting
Nov 18th	Deadline for submission to Scottish Community Care Committee on Health Impact of GM crops
Nov 20th	2:30-5, Governments Public Debate Steering Group meeting
Nov 21st	ACNFP meeting, Cambridge. Tel: 0207 276 8595. Email: acnfp@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk
Dec 6th	10:30-1, Governments Public Debate Steering Group meeting
Dec 16th	Deadline for responses to DEFRA's proposed changes to the national list written representation and hearing procedures



The Supporters of The Five Year Freeze are:

Action Aid, Action Against Allergy, Additives Survivors' Network, Agricultural Christian Fellowship, Baby Milk Action, Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union, Biodynamic Agricultural Association, Black Environmental Network, Body Shop International PLC, British Allergy Foundation, British Association of Fair Trade Shops, British Association of Nature Conservation, British Naturopathic Association, Caduceus, Catholic Institute International Relations, Centre for Alternative Technology, Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, Christian Aid, Christian Ecology Link, Communities Against Toxics, Compassion In World Farming, Corporate Watch, Council for the Protection of Rural England, Culpepers, Ecologist, Ecology Building Society, Elm Farm Research Centre, Ethical Consumer, Econexus, Farm-A-Round Ltd, Farming and Livestock Concern, Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens, Find Your Feet, Food Commission, Food for Health Network, Food Poverty Network, Forum for the Future, Fresh Food Company, Freshlands UK, Friends of the Earth, Friends of the Earth Scotland, Gaia Foundation, Gardeners GMO Group, GE Free Forests, Genetics Food Alert, Genetics Forum, GeneWatch UK, GMO Campaign, Good Gardeners Association, Green & Blacks, Green Books, Green Network, Green Party, Greenpeace, Guild of Fine Food Retailers, Guild of Food Writers, Harvest Help, HDRA, Health Food Manufacturer's Association, HIPPO, Hyperactive Children's Support Group, Iceland Foods, Institute for Science in Society, Intermediate Technology Development Group, International Society for Ecology and Culture, Islamic Concern, Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environment Sciences, Living Lightly, Local Government Association, Longhouse Food Consultancy, Maternity Alliance, Medact, Muslim Council of Great Britain, National Association of Health Stores, National Federation of Women's Institutes, National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners Ltd, Natural Law Party, Natures Store Ltd., Neal's Yard Bakery, Neal's Yard Remedies, New Economics Foundation, New Internationalist, Noah Project, Organic Farm Foods Wales, Organic Gardening, Organic Shop, Organics Direct, Oxfam, People & Planet, Permaculture Association UK, Permaculture Magazine, Permanent Publications, Pesticides Action Network UK, Plamil FoodPlanet Organic, Positive News, Pret A Manger, Resurgence, Scientists for Global Responsibility, Scottish Consumers Association for Natural Food, Small Farms Association, Soil Association, Student Environment Network, TGWU, The Harbour, Townswomen's Guilds, Traidcraft Plc, Triodos Bank, Unison, Vegan Society, Vegetarian Society, Network UK, Vinceremos Wines & Spirits Ltd, Whole Earth Foods Ltd, Wholesome Food Association, Wildlife Trusts, Womankind Worldwide, Women's Environmental Network, Woodland Trust, World Development Movement, World Wide Fund for Nature.

The Five Year Freeze is also supported by over 45 local authorities and 200 wholefood shops, restaurants and other local businesses.

In supporting the Five Year Freeze each of the above organisations is indicating its formal support in those areas where it has specific competence. Each also acknowledges the arguments of the other supporters of the Five Year Freeze in their respective fields in relation to the campaign. In addition each organisation supports the overall call for a Five Year Freeze.