

# Freeze Update

**Five year  
FREEZE**  
on genetic engineering and  
patenting in food and farming

## 'Public Debate' plans run into difficulty

Planning for the public debate on GM issues has run into a slight obstacle – namely, not enough money. This was something anticipated by many (including the Freeze) when the Secretary of State, Margaret Beckett, first announced plans for the debate. The Central Office of Information (COI), contracted to organise the debate, informed the Steering Board that there would not be enough funds to run a process that adequately achieved the objectives set by the Board. This was despite the fact that it was on the advice of COI that Government only allocated the original amount of £250,000.

The figure required to run a robust and worthwhile debate that optimises the opportunities for people to engage adequately is nearer the £1 million mark. A request has gone to the Secretary of State for the allocation of more funds –

but whether this will be met or not remains to be seen. There is however almost unanimity among Steering Board members that the process must not be compromised to the extent that it becomes the 'sham' that many people fear it is already. So if there is no more money available, or the Government comes back with less than enough, tough decisions will have to be made. As a result of this setback, plans for the public debate, due to start in February next year are still unclear.

### Science Review

The Science Review has now been launched under the lead of Prof. David King, the Government's Chief Scientific Advisor, and the review panel has held its first meeting. It is clear that there are still a lot of uncertainties as to how the process is going to unfold. However, there is an

intention that the website, [www.sciencedebate.org.uk](http://www.sciencedebate.org.uk), will play a major role in allowing members of the public and the scientific community to make contributions or ask questions.

Meetings of the review panel will take place in public, and in addition open meetings are planned on particular issues – two are already planned on Food Safety and Gene Flow (for details of these and other meetings associated with the Public Debate see 'Dates for your Diary' inside).

### Economics Review

In our last newsletter we asked members to respond to the Strategy Unit's scoping document on the 'Costs and Benefits of GM Crops'. 150 responses were received and will be posted on the website along with a summary by the SU, [http://www.strategy.gov.uk/2002/gm/downloads/sub\\_sum.pdf](http://www.strategy.gov.uk/2002/gm/downloads/sub_sum.pdf). A big thank you to Freeze supporters - over 30 submitted responses. The SU is now preparing a paper outlining the methodology which will underpin the review. This will also be published on the web for comment in January.

## Gene futures conference: debating the options

The Five Year Freeze, together with Elm Farm Research, GeneWatch UK and Unilever, in association with the Guardian, will be hosting a one day conference titled '*Gene Futures: debating the use of GM crops and foods in the UK*' on 11th of February 2003 at the Royal Society of Arts, London. The conference aims to enhance the public's engagement with the public debate, scientific and economic reviews and consequently Government policy

decisions in 2003. It will bring together key voices in the scientific, regulatory, agricultural and policy communities to highlight important questions and explore the different options faced by the UK on the commercialisation of GM crops in the UK.

Confirmed speakers include English Nature, Monsanto, University of New York, Elm Farm Research Centre, National Farmers Union, GeneCampaign

(India), Consumers Association, Friends of the Earth and CropGen.

We urge Freeze supporters to book tickets as soon as possible as the venue has a maximum capacity of 200 people. Please fill out the enclosed form or telephone 01298 872 531, or visit [www.genewatch.org](http://www.genewatch.org), for information and to book a ticket.

Five Year Freeze, 94 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF

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## GM Growing Pains

There has been a great deal of reporting of the market problems for US GM crops. As a result of the problems, the Canadian National Farmers Unions, American Corn Growers Association and the Canadian Wheat Board are among 200 groups lobbying for a moratorium on the growing of GM wheat. However, in the battle for a moratorium, these groups will be up against the Monsanto established Roundup Ready Wheat Grower Advisory Panel, made up of directors and executives from US prairie farm organisations, with the de riguer confidentiality agreements payment and expenses accounts.

## EU labelling and traceability news

At the Environment Council meeting on December 9 and 10, Ministers from Member States agreed on new rules for tracing and labelling GM material in food. This followed on from the Agriculture Council meeting in November. The outcome would mean:

- Foods would be labelled if they contain GM material above 0.9%
- GM animal feed would be labelled. Food manufacturers would be able to choose meat and dairy products from animals not fed on GM.
- Ingredients derived from GM crops would be labelled, irrespective of GM DNA being detectable in the final food product. This reflects the public's desire to know if GM technology has been used in the production process, and would require derivatives, such as vegetable oils, to be labelled.

It is clear from both national and European public surveys that consumers do not want to eat GM ingredients and these standards go some way in helping people to avoid GM material.

However, most disappointingly, the Ministers backed a proposal allowing 0.5% contamination of food products by unauthorised GM ingredients (providing that they have undergone the necessary risk assessments) for a period of three years.

In these negotiations several countries required a strengthening of standards, however the UK favoured maintaining rules as they are. The UK is against traceability systems for GM, arguing that it is too costly to segregate and open to fraud. The regulations now need approval by the European Parliament. This next stage will take place next spring under the Greek presidency.

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## A voice from the South – Dr Tewolde of the Ethiopian Environmental Protection Agency visits the House of Commons

*Since the summer months, the issue of the US GM food aid to African states facing famine has gained global political priority and the UK's media interest almost daily.*

*Five Year Freeze supporter, the Gaia Foundation, has close relations with groups in Africa and has been a valuable host to bringing discussions on this issue to the UK NGO community. With the recent visit of Dr Tewolde, we asked Matt Mellen from the Gaia Foundation to convey his thoughts on the significance of the debate on food security and GM food aid.*

The debate over genetic modification (GM) has reached new levels of intensity in the UK, and also in Africa, where soon millions may be at risk of starvation. The biotech industry claims that GM crops are a key to alleviating hunger in developing nations but there are fears that they intend to integrate their technology "by the back door" using food aid. There have been accusations blaming Europe for Africa's resistance to GM food aid, implying that Africans have no opinion of their own.

Perfect timing for the arrival of Dr Tewolde Gebre Egziabher, head of Ethiopia's Environmental Protection Agency. He went to the House of Commons on the 27th November with a clear message:

"Genetically Engineered crops are not the solution to Africa's hunger crisis – whatever Europeans or US biotech corporations say."

An expert in cyclical drought and sustainability, Dr Tewolde insists that the key to preventing famine lies in food security i.e. diversifying food production and farmer's incomes, improving infrastructure (roads and silos), improving the financial resources of the government and appropriate aid strategies.

Tewolde's message, that flies in the face of the mainstream propaganda from biotechnology industry sources, maintains that the strategy of donating GM maize is fundamentally flawed in the long and short term if the stated aim is to help Africa recover from poor harvests.

- In the short term the introduction of large quantities of externally sourced crops has the effect of reducing prices, which further damages the agricultural production systems and slows recovery.
- In the long term GM aid increases the chances of GM crops being grown in Ethiopia and the adoption of the industrial agriculture model of the west. GM crops could have unpredictable effects on environmental and human health. They are not well integrated into mixed

animal/arable farms. The monoculture techniques are inherently vulnerable to environmental change and they are not sustainable.

For Dr Tewolde it is clear that GM is a technology used to make its owners richer rather than alleviate hunger. This voice of sanity is beginning to be heard. In response to Tewolde's briefing Mr Meacher exclaimed:

"It is wicked when there is such an excess of non-GM food aid available for GM to be forced on countries for reasons of politics."

With a concerted push to get Africa's voice into the media it should soon become apparent that the US is increasingly isolated in its drive to spread GE globally. The OECD, EU and international aid agencies all recommend that food aid should be given in cash. The US currently uses aid as an extra subsidy for its own farmers and as a means to consolidate its biotech industry's control of global agriculture. It is clearly time to listen to the recipients and reform the aid process.

*Matt Mellen, the Gaia Foundation. For more information telephone 0207 435 5000.*

## US Biotech company fined for animal vaccine and soybean mix up

It was announced in December that the US Department of Agriculture will fine ProdiGene Inc. in Nebraska \$250,000 for mixing genetically engineered corn containing an experimental animal vaccine (not intended for humans) with soybeans for human consumption.

The problem started back in 2001 when ProdiGene contracted with a Nebraska farmer to grow the experimental animal vaccine corn crop on a small plot of land. When the test was completed, the same farmer in spring 2002 planted conventional soybeans on the land. However, some seed left over from the previous year's experiment grew into plants in the soybean crop.

This soybean mix up is reminiscent of the Starlink crisis two years ago when corn not approved for human consumption, was used in millions of dollars worth of food products that had to be recalled. This clearly shows how accidents of this type can occur, resulting in expensive recalls.

## Farm Scale Evaluations – 7th report now available

The 7th Interim Report of the Farm Scale Evaluations of Genetically-Modified Herbicide Tolerant crops is now available on the DEFRA website [www.defra.gov.uk/environment/fse/reports/021101/pdf/ssc7th\\_021101.pdf](http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/fse/reports/021101/pdf/ssc7th_021101.pdf). It covers the period March - October 2002 on the conclusion of the final field seasons of beet, spring oilseed rape and maize, and the conclusion of the second field season and the start of the final field season of winter oilseed rape.

It appears from the report that they still haven't decided what to do about damaged trials: "Damage to field sites (mostly deliberate) has remained a problem during 2002, affecting 13 maize, 3 beet, 8 spring rape and 6 winter rape sites in total. The extent of damage has varied considerably, and is currently under review with respect to the use of data collected after incidents of damage."

The final round of winter oilseed rape has been planted at 68 sites. Info on locations is available from [www.defra.gov.uk](http://www.defra.gov.uk).



## GM – a warning on the cost to farmers....

"It does not matter how Monsanto's rape gets into a field – by pollination, birds or wind – it becomes Monsanto's property".

"If anyone grows any plant which is cross-pollinated by Monsanto's gene, it becomes Monsanto's property".

**Judge in the Monsanto vs. Schmeiser case, Canada, 2002, costing farmer Percy Schmeiser \$200,000 in legal costs and the \$153,000 he was ordered to pay Monsanto.**

*(Source: Landmark, Farmers World Network, Oct 02)*

## Oregon labelling fails due to \$5 million industry campaign

### Proof that money talks?

In November, Oregon, USA voted on the labelling of GM ingredients in foods. A huge campaign by opponents highlighting higher costs to restaurants and food retailers, took place in the run

up to the ballot. As a result voters roundly rejected the initiative which would have produced the first such labelling law in the country, handing a victory to big food producers and biotechnology industry.

## At a glance - Dates for your diary:

Jan 5th	9:15-10:45 'The legal minefield', a GM workshop by the Soil Association. Royal Agricultural College, Cirencester. Contact Annabel Gabb Tel:0117 929 0661. Email: <a href="mailto:AGabb@SoilAssociation.org">AGabb@SoilAssociation.org</a>
Jan 21st	10:30 –1. Public Debate Steering Board meeting. London. Open to public observers. Tel:0207215 6508
Jan 23rd	Government GM Science Review open meeting on GM Food Safety. Science Museum, London. Tel: 0207 973 3052 for a ticket.
Jan 27th	Government GM Science Review open meeting on Gene Flow. Royal Society, Edinburgh. Tel: 0207 215 2237. Email: <a href="mailto:evidenceadvice@royalsoced.org.uk">evidenceadvice@royalsoced.org.uk</a> .
Feb 11th	'GM Futures – debating the use of GM crops and foods in the UK'. RSA, London. Tel: 01298 872 531.
Feb 18th	Second Science Review Panel meeting, London. Open to public observers. Tel: 0207 215 2237 <a href="http://www.gmsciencedebate.org">www.gmsciencedebate.org</a>
Feb 20th	10:30–1. Public Debate Steering Board meeting. London. Open to public observers. Tel: 0207 215 6508.

## Food Standards Agency plans it's own mini- public debate

Has no-one told the FSA that the AEBC is conducting a public debate on GM foods at the request of the Government? It appears not, as the FSA have plans to carry out it's own 'GM food debate'.

Since the Government initiated public debate steering board announced in November that more funding was necessary for the public debate, it seems odd that the FSA should spend over £100,000 of public money on a parallel process – including an interactive website, a citizen's jury and a school debate.

This apparent duplication appears to be pointless, and begs the question, which results will the Government pay attention to? The outcome of the FSA's debate or the AEBC's public debate outcome?

### action...action...action

**Write to Sir John Krebs and ask what the purpose of the FSA's public debate on GM is and how will it's outcome relate to the AEBC public debate?**

**FSA, Aviation House, 125 Kingsway, London WC2B 6NH**

# Soil Association gives evidence to AEBC on liability

The Soil Association recently warned that there is currently no legal protection for farmers affected by GM contamination.

In giving evidence to the Agriculture and Environment Biotechnology Commission in November Peter Melchett, Soil Association Policy Director, stressed that the law must be changed before any commercial growing of GM crops is allowed in the UK. Biotechnology companies must be fully accountable for any losses suffered by farmers or other parts of the food industry as a result of GM contamination.

Peter Melchett warned that non-GM farmers are at risk of losing sales and

income, and for organic farmers the losses could be even more serious. He cited six years' experience of commercial growing of GM crops in the USA and Canada, showing that widespread contamination of non-organic and organic farming systems is inevitable.

Just weeks after this meeting the reality of the 'polluted pays' arose when the Soil Association's Certification body, discovered organic soya contaminated with Monsanto's GM Roundup Ready soya, believed to have been imported from Italy. Production of organic feed containing soya was stopped at the mill while the contamination incident was investigated and measures put in place to prevent a repetition.



## 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.

### action...action...action

#### Order your 'Say no to Chardon LL' postcards now

Britain's first GM crop could soon be used to produce the dairy products you eat!  
You can take action to make sure this doesn't happen!

GM Campaign postcards to send to manufacturers of dairy products are available for local groups and shoppers by phoning 01803 840098, or from [dairy@gmfreee.info](mailto:dairy@gmfreee.info) or [www.gmfreee.info](http://www.gmfreee.info).

Chardon LL fodder maize would be grown to feed to dairy cows, and could be grown commercially in Britain within a year. The campaign postcards ask companies to guarantee that they will not use milk products from cows which have been fed Chardon maize.

The postcard campaign is targeting major supermarkets and dairy companies across the country. You can help by visiting the website above or by telephoning the campaign to find out where you can direct your postcards to have an impact.

Let producers and retailers know you want to choose non-GM produce!

### Stay in touch!

If you don't normally receive this bi-monthly newsletter and would like to, please write to us at **Five Year Freeze, 94 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF.**

A minimum £5 donation is asked to cover printing and postage.

If you are able to distribute this newsletter to events/local shops/farmers markets please contact Rachel at the Five Year Freeze and let her know how many you would like.

*Please make cheques payable to 'The Five Year Freeze'*

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