

Freeze Update

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

Public debate or public debacle?

The public debate on GM kicks off against the backdrop of a US led trade war against the EU for its position on GM, and 19 new applications for importing and growing GM crops queuing up in Europe for approval.

Michael Meacher recently confirmed that it is the science - the results of the farm scale trials and the science review - which will influence the decision making process, and not the views of members of the public. It is therefore understandable that the idea of debating the issue across the towns and villages of the UK must seem like a farce, a waste of time, and nothing more than a cynical PR exercise on the part of Government.

All this may well be true. The process itself is undoubtedly flawed, will be inaccessible to many people, and for those who for years have campaigned tirelessly on this issue it may indeed seem like a waste of time better spent.

It is perhaps important at this point to take stock. There already is a 'public debate', and there has been for over five years now - and undoubtedly it will continue well beyond the 'official' debate cut-off date of July 18th. This debate was initiated by shoppers, gardeners, farmers, chefs, scientists -

certainly wasn't wanted by the biotech industry when they first brought GM foods to our shelves from the US six years ago unannounced and unlabelled. And neither did the UK Government want it. Even now, having initiated the current process, they would undoubtedly rather not have to bother, as demonstrated by the inadequate budget first allocated and their steadfast refusal to include the farm scale trials in the process.

GM NATION – How to engage. See inside

It is this real 'public debate' carried out in pubs and village halls and schools and fields over the last few years which has resulted in most UK retailers and food producers removing GM products from the shelves. It has prevented widescale growing of GM crops in the UK countryside. It has resulted in no new approvals in the EU for five years. And it has produced a four fold increase in the sale of organic food.

So – our views *have* been heard, where it matters. It may be a sad indictment of the

state of our democracy that the Government chooses not to listen – but don't let that stop us from voicing our concerns. Attend a meeting if there is one near you – or get hold of a feedback form and fill it in. But at the same time don't stop telling supermarkets that you don't want to eat GM foods, or farmers that you are unhappy about GM crops growing in your neighbourhood.

For me, this debate isn't just about preventing the commercial growing of GM crops in the UK. Nor is it about conveying the negative, anti-science view that proponents of GM love to accuse us of. Rather it is about making a positive contribution to the on-going debate, post BSE and Foot and Mouth, about the future of food and farming in the UK. What kind of agriculture can produce safe, environmentally sustainable food – and not just here but across the globe? What system of food production can provide decent livelihoods for farmers, and food for all, both here and in developing countries? I remain unconvinced and skeptical that GM foods can provide the answers to these questions.

Clare Devereux

Food Standards Agency hides key findings from GM Citizens Jury

The FSA's recent work on GM as a contribution to the Public Debate has caused much controversy. Even their own consumer committee, including the National Consumer Council, Sustain and the Consumer's Association, issued a critical report of their activities, saying that the materials were biased, that they should have been consulted and that much of the work did not constitute proper qualitative research.

The nearest the FSA came to robust participatory methodology was the

holding of a Citizens Jury. The jury addressed the question: 'Should GM Foods be available to buy in the UK?' – and 9 out of 15 of the Jury members voted that it should. However, in the press release from the FSA headlining the above results they neglected to mention any of the key findings produced by the jury. At the current time this doesn't even seem to be available on the FSA website. Could this be because they are very revealing, and contradicts much of the FSA's policy on GM?

In the interests of openness and transparency we have reproduced the unanimous key findings of the jury below:

- Growing GM crops in the UK would be irreversible and might eventually reduce choice
- There is very little information available to the general public about GM food. If it is to be widely available consumers need to understand all the related issues before choosing whether or not to buy it

Continued inside

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

Tel: 020 7837 0642. Fax: 020 7837 1141

Email: enquiry@fiveyearfreeze.org Web: www.fiveyearfreeze.org

Five year FREEZE

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Continued from cover

FSA hides key findings from GM Citizens Jury

- The public needs to know what GM means and what tests are being carried out to ensure it is safe
- The public needs to know more about the regulating bodies and their responsibilities
- There should always be a choice between GM, non-GM and organic food and labelling is an extremely important issue in relation to choice
- There should be a GM logo on every product that contains GM foods or derivatives, or that has been made using a GM processing agent
- There should be clear labelling on meat and milk from animals that have been fed using GM foods
- There are ethical concerns about the progress of GM food and how far we are going to take this scientific process
- There is particular concern about genetically modifying animals as well as crossing barriers between animals and plants.

...news...

International GM-free zones

Switzerland's lower parliamentary house has approved a five-year moratorium on the farming of GM crops.

In May the Commission of Agriculture and Food in the Albanian Parliament voted for a ban of GMOs for a 5 year period.

This decision was strongly influenced by environmental NGOs in Albania, scientists and academics, the Albanian Consumer Association and Organic Agriculture Association.

New staff at the Freeze

Welcome to Carrie Stebbings who has joined the Five Year Freeze as Co-ordinator. Her email address is carrie@fiveyearfreeze.org

Many thanks to Rachel Sutton, who has moved on to the UK Food Group, for her hard work over the last seven months.

How to engage in GM Na

What you can do.....

GM Nation has been designed to enable people to engage with the issues and contribute their views to the Government. It is not intended that the public meetings follow the traditional format of public meetings with speakers for and against, but rather will present an opportunity for members of the public to direct their own deliberations on the issues and fully engage with the process.

There is a feedback form which along with asking some specific questions allows you to contribute your views on GM crops. Whatever you decide to do it is important that you fill this in if you want to contribute to the official process.

If you would like to participate in GM Nation? The Public Debate, and make your views known, there are several ways you can do this:

- **Attend a meeting:** Several regional meetings have been organised – attend the one nearest you (see box for booking details). These meetings have been organised by the Public Debate Steering Board and will be attended by members of the Board.
- In addition various other meetings will be hosted by County Councils and other local organisations – to find if there is one near you call Lee Hancock on 020 7261 8616 or check the website www.gmnation.org.uk regularly for updates. *If you are able to attend a meeting and are willing to take materials along with you please call us on 0207 837 0642.*
- **Organise a meeting:** You may want to organise an event either in your community or with friends and colleagues. A free tool-kit with a video, CD-rom and workbook has been put together to help you do this and is available from Lee Hancock on 0207 261 8616. *If you want to organise meeting we can also help supply you with leaflets, and support, please call 0207 837 0642.*
- **Visit the website:** You can record your views online between 27 May and 18 July by completing the feedback form at www.gmnation.org.uk

- **Send your views by post:** If you are unable to attend a meeting or access the internet, you can post your views by completing a printed feedback form before 18th July. Copies of the form together with a video, CD-rom and a booklet setting out the issues can be ordered from 0207 261 88616.

Whatever you decide to do – keep us informed and if we can help in anyway with leaflets or other support, do get in touch. We would also like to know if you experience any problems with obtaining information from the telephone numbers or website above. Good luck.

If you want your views included in the final report of the debate, you must fill in and return the feedback form by 18th July 2003.

GM Nation: Regional launch meetings

Birmingham

Date: Tuesday 3rd June
Venue: NEC. Time: 3–5pm

Swansea

Date: Thursday 5th June
Venue: Brangwyn Hall. Time: 6–8pm

Taunton

Date: Saturday 7th June
Venue: Holiday Inn, Taunton.
Time: 2–4pm

Belfast

Date: Monday 9th June
Venue: King's Hall Belfast. Time: 6–8pm

Glasgow

Date: Wednesday 11th June
Venue: Glasgow Quality Hotel.
Time: 6–8pm

Harrogate

Date: Friday 13th June
Venue: Pavilions (Yorkshire Showground).
Time: 2–4pm

To book:

Tel: 020 7261 8616
Fax: 020 7261 8588
Email: lee.hancock@coi.gsi.gov.uk
Address: GM Nation? PO Box 44431,
London SE1 7YW.

tion? The public debate

The issues – important points to raise

For those people attending meetings during GM Nation? here are some key issues to raise or consider during the process:

- Why do we need GM food? Currently biotechnology companies stand to gain the most from its production – claims of benefits to consumers and the environment have so far failed to materialise
- GM crops still threaten the environment through cross pollination and further degradation of biodiversity
- GM food safety testing is inadequate – there have been no clinical trials testing the safety of GM foods to human health
- Consumer choice is threatened – the right of shoppers to continue to buy GM free produce will be impossible to maintain
- It is unlikely that GM and non-GM farming, and particularly organic, can co-exist in the UK countryside without clear laws on adequate separation distances and without a liability regime
- The lack of liability laws mean that the taxpayer will pay for any future problems – or that farmers will pick up the tab for any economic damage

- GM food will not solve world hunger problems – the real causes of hunger are political and economic – the balance of benefits and costs of GM crops is unlikely to benefit poor communities
- The argument is often made that GM food will be cheaper for consumers – but the reality is that the costs of keeping food GM free will be borne by producers and the consumers making the food we have always bought more expensive
- It is often claimed that GM will be the saviour of UK agriculture enabling farmers to compete on the global market, however the structural problems facing farmers are far greater than the promise of a techno fix for which there is no market.

The leaflet "Do you want GM crops growing in the UK?" lays out some of these vital issues that need to be addressed before any decisions are made. You can get more detailed background information from www.gmleaflet.org or call 020 7837 0642 for copies of the leaflet to help you to argue the case!

Questioning the process

We have many concerns about the process of the public debate. Despite sitting on the steering board and endeavouring to create as good a process as possible – there are many reasons why the result is far from perfect. We believe that people should highlight these concerns if attending meetings – or if you have decided not to participate make sure that the reasons why you aren't are known. Write letters to your MP or Ministers to let them know. If not, the danger is that the Government will blame non-participation on lack of concern about the issue, rather than a flawed process in which people have been unable to participate.

Concerns to raise:

- What attention will the Government pay to the views of participants – will the outcome contribute to the decision making process?

- Lack of adequate resources to run a meaningful process
- Insufficient time to organise meetings and lack of information on how to get involved – this is likely to mean that the debate will fail to reach large numbers of members of the public, and particularly those whose voices are not usually heard on this issue
- Lack of inclusion of the results of the farm scale trials, due in September, means that vital information can not be considered by members of the public
- Lack of clarity on how the reviews of the science and the economics will interact and inform the public debate and vice versa

Key contacts

Here are some key organisations which can help provide you with leaflets and information if you are taking part in GM Nation?

Five Year Freeze
www.fiveyearfreeze.org
020 7837 0642

GeneWatch
www.genewatch.org
01298 871898

Greenpeace
www.uk.greenpeace.org.uk
020 7865 8100

Friends of the Earth
www.foe.co.uk
020 7490 1555

GM Nation? Official Public Debate Website
www.gmnation.org.uk
020 7261 8616

...news...

UK GM-free zones

Warwickshire County Council has voted to go GM-free, joining a growing protest against GM crops at local authority level across the country.

Cornwall, South Gloucestershire and South Hams District Council voted to go GM-free earlier this year. Devon County Council has stated its opposition to GM trials, and along with Dorset has called on the South West Regional Assembly to take a position on GM. GM-free votes have also taken place in a number of town and district councils. To email your local council to ask them to go GM-free log on to www.gmfreebritain.com

US challenges EU's policy on GM Foods at the WTO



On the 13th May 2003 the US, Argentina, Canada and Egypt made a formal complaint to the World Trade Organisation over what they describe as the EU's illegal, non-science based moratorium on Biotech foods and crops.

In a press release the Office of the US Trade Representative stated that the EU's action "has perpetuated a trade barrier unwarranted by the EC's own scientific analysis, which impedes the global use of a technology that could be of great benefit to farmers and consumers around the world". It also states that the EU is unfairly casting concerns about biotech products around the world, particularly in developing countries.

The European Commission responded that the challenge is legally unwarranted, economically unfounded and politically unhelpful and questioned the US's motives. It argued that there is no official moratorium and no new GMOs have been authorised for release in to the environment due to the fact that the EU's regulatory regime was incomplete to address the challenges posed by GM. The EU is also in the process of finalising the adoption of the rules on labelling and traceability, which aim at responding to citizens' demands for more and better information on GMOs.

The consequences of a finding against the EU on GM would be serious: the EU may no longer be able to maintain its moratori-

um on GM crops and in future it may not be able to implement decisions to label food containing GM ingredients, thus eliminating consumers' rights to choose not to eat GM food.

If European countries responded to the concerns of their citizens by attempting to enforce such laws, the WTO could grant the US sweeping rights to retaliate with tariffs and restrictions on a wide range of EU goods. If the EU then retaliated, a full blown trade war could result.

A WTO finding against the EU would also act as a warning to other countries which might take a different view on GM to that of the US.

It is vital that we support the EU in its efforts to resist pressure from the US to override democratically arrived at decisions about food and farming in the UK and to attempt to enforce such a decision through trade sanctions.

action...action...action

Email or write to the US Ambassador expressing your regret at the decision the US has taken.

Ambassador William S. Farish, The American Embassy, 24 Grosvenor Square, London W1A 1AE or take part in the FoE email action at: <http://www.foe.co.uk/>

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, GM-Free Cymru, 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, 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 Food, Planet Organic, Positive News, Pret A Manger, Resurgence, Scientists for Global Responsibility, Scottish Beekeepers Association, 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, Vetwork UK, Vinceremos Wines & Spirits Ltd, Welsh Beekeepers Association, 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 50 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.

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 Carrie at the Five Year Freeze and let her know how many you would like.

Please make cheques payable to 'The Five Year Freeze'

Name	
Address:	
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Email:	Donation enclosed: £