

Five year
FREEZE

on genetic engineering and
patenting in food and farming

Freeze Update

GM Nation? The public debate closes, but the wider debate must continue

Following months of preparation and its fair share of controversy, the six week Government-sponsored public debate, GM Nation? ended on Friday 18th July.

Lack of awareness of the debate and confusion over how to get involved contributed to a slow start for local authorities and the public organising their own GM Nation? meetings. However, latest figures show that over 450 meetings took place around the country and more than 40,000 feedback forms were returned. This is an excellent response.

Despite widespread cynicism, and the lack of resources surrounding the debate, many members of the public rose to the challenge and organised local meetings, large and small, proving beyond doubt that people are not apathetic about this issue.

Congratulations to everyone who got involved. We think your efforts have been fantastic!

The Freeze has received a lot of feedback from our supporters about the organisation of the debate, which we have collated and sent to the Public Debate Steering Board. We have asked them to include this

feedback in the report of the outcomes of the debate that will be produced in September.

The great success of the GM Nation? exercise has been to re-ignite vibrant debate around the country and to expose many of the issues surrounding GM, particularly in the national media. We must now wait and see how the Government will respond to the process.

The fact that the Strategy Unit report was published only one week before the end of GM Nation? and that the science review and the results of the farm scale evaluations were not available before it ended, gives us a great opportunity to ensure that the wider public debate continues for many months.

As we head through the summer and towards the autumn the GM issue is still very much on the agenda: the results of the farm scale evaluations and the report on the outcomes of the public debate will be published, the government may push ahead the approvals process for the introduction of GM crops to the UK, and the US will pursue its challenge at the



"They say they represent 800 million consumers, and they'd like some Feedback forms."

World Trade Organisation to try to force GM food in to the European market.

If you would like to send your own comments to the Steering Board about any aspect of the debate you can write to them at: Public Debate Steering Board, Bay 479, 1 Victoria Street, London SW1 0ET- with a copy to us at the Freeze if possible..

See inside for an account from a regional meeting

Major Actions for Autumn.....

Tractors and Trolleys against GM Monday 13th October

If you want to ensure a GM-free harvest, join farmers, consumers, tractors and trolleys in a series of activities over the summer culminating in a mass action in London.

Phone Carrie on 020 7837 0642 for more details.

Write to Tony Blair

We are launching a letter writing campaign to Tony Blair to coincide with the Tractors and Trolleys event. We will deliver your letters to 10 Downing Street on 13th October as part of the march.

THANKS.....

A huge thank you to everyone who responded to our appeal for funds to reprint the "Do you want GM crops growing in the UK?" leaflet in time for the public debate. We were able to print another 50,000 in June and thanks to your efforts, we have already distributed 140,000 in total all over the country.

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

Account from the Harrogate GM Nation? regional meeting

Becky Price of Genewatch UK was one of about 200 people who attended the GM Nation? regional meeting in Harrogate on the 13th June. Here is her account of the meeting.

Initial disagreement arose when discussion broke out about whether the Government had agreed to take the results of the Public Debate in to account or not when making policy decisions on GM.

Malcolm Grant, Chair of the Public Debate Steering Board, tried to reassure people that they had nothing to be sceptical about, but this backfired and seemed to increase the level of distrust in the debate process.

Once the meeting started the discussion process itself had a number of problems, the biggest of which was lack of time. We had about 40 minutes, which only gave us time to state our views and very briefly say why we held them.

The second problem was the structure of the discussions in the small groups. Having never met one another we had to elect a facilitator, who then had to guide us through difficult and contentious issues with no previous facilitation experience.

The structure of the meeting invited us to try to address exactly what level of risk or benefit there might be in GM crops, questions that in the main those present were not qualified to answer. This led to a strong sense of frustration in our group.

A possibly better process would have been to look at what kind of principles decision makers could use in addressing GM crops. For example, a GM crop that claims to benefit the environment should perhaps only be approved when it is shown that this is the best practical way of achieving that environmental benefit.

Despite these criticisms it is important to acknowledge that the GM Nation? debate, with both limited resources and time, was always going to be difficult. The willingness of the public to be involved and their level of understanding showed how much they care about the subject. I now hope this is reflected in the final report to be published in September.

Becky Price

Canadian farmers warn against GM crops

In July three Canadian farmers, including the President of the Canadian National Union of Farmers, Stewart Wells, visited the UK to publicise their negative experiences of growing GM crops in Canada. The Canadians have been growing GM oil seed rape (OSR) for seven years and are now facing the introduction of GM wheat.

The farmers met with DEFRA officials as well as with representatives from the NFU and a variety of NGOs and campaign groups.

Although they reported some advantages from GM crops in terms of reduced work load, there was an unexpected additional expense in the cost of controlling the "volunteer crop", OSR plants that grow after the crop has been harvested.

As a result of being engineered to be resistant to the glyphosate herbicide, other more toxic mixes of herbicides have to be used to clear the volunteers. The farmers say they were not warned about this by the biotech companies.

In a stark warning, farmer Wayne Amos said that the co-existence of GM and non-GM crops will not be possible in the UK. In Canada organic crops of OSR have been virtually wiped out as seeds have become contaminated and cross-pollination is widespread, with GM OSR now growing wild on roadside verges.

As in the UK, there are no liability laws in Canada for holding the biotech companies responsible for pollution from their crops. Any disputes must be resolved between the farmers, their lawyers and the company involved.

Several Saskatchewan farmers, including Percy Schmeiser, are currently being sued by Monsanto for growing Roundup Ready OSR in violation of the company's patent rights because they had not signed the agreement to pay to grow the crops.

The judge in the Schmeiser case found in favour of Monsanto and ordered him to pay almost \$175,000 in compensation. Schmeiser has now been given leave to appeal the decision in the Canadian Supreme Court.

The Canadian National Farmers Union has written a report to their Government calling for a rejection of GM wheat in Canada and in a recent press release described GM wheat as the equivalent of BSE for grain farmers. Their concerns include market loss, destruction of a viable organic industry, increased agronomic costs and environmental risks.

In Canada there is a coalition of farming and civil society organisations calling for a moratorium on growing GM wheat. You can find more information at www.nfu.ca

Carrie Stebbings

New reports

The Nuffield Council on Bioethics: *The use of Genetically Modified Crops in Developing Countries.* Available at www.nuffieldbioethics.org/home/ or phone 020 7681 9619. Comments are invited by 8th August

The Independent Science Panel: *The Case for a GM-Free Sustainable World.* Available at www.indsp.org or write to ISP, PO Box 32097, London, NW1 0XR

Institute of Development Studies: *Democratising Biotechnology: Genetically Modified Crops in Developing Countries.* Available at www.ids.ac.uk/biotech or phone 01273 606261

International Council for Science: *New Genetics, Food and Agriculture: Scientific Discoveries – Societal Dilemmas.* Available at www.icsu.org or phone 00 33 1 45 25 03 29 (France)

ActionAid: *GM Crops – Going Against the Grain.* Available at www.actionaid.org or phone 020 7561 7561

Friends of the Earth: *Unleashing a new Pollution? GM oilseed rape and it's wild relatives.* Available at www.foe.co.uk/campaigns/real_food/resource/campaigners.html or phone 020 7490 1555

Update on the US challenge to EU at the WTO

In the last Freeze update for May-June 2003, we mentioned the formal complaint being made by the US with Argentina, Canada and Egypt to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) about the EU's moratorium on biotech food and crops. Egypt later withdrew from the complaint procedure.

Preliminary talks between the US and EU to try and resolve the complaint broke down at the end of June and the US declared its intention to convene a WTO panel to hear the case.

Early in July, the EU passed legislation on GM traceability and labelling. This, rather than the moratorium which it technically supersedes, may be the true target of US wrath. In fact Pascal Lamy, the EU trade representative, warned the US against going to the WTO about it. The US opposes the labelling of GM food and the precautionary principle, which underpins the EU approach to regulation.

The precautionary principle is also central to the Cartagena Biosafety Protocol,

which regulates the movement of GMOs between countries (except for pharmaceuticals). This international treaty is attached to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and will come into force 11th September 2003. The US wants the WTO to take precedence over the Biosafety Protocol and has twice tried to capture GM issues for the WTO.

However, there is strong opposition from governments and civil society organisations around the world.

If the US goes ahead with the panel, the EU will probably respond in November, when NGOs will have further opportunities to highlight the issues in support of the EU. Meanwhile we should all support the strong implementation of the Biosafety Protocol and call for it to be the sole international regulator of GMOs.

The Freeze will be co-ordinating action around this. Watch this space for more news in the autumn.

Helena Paul

Europe strengthens GM labelling rules

The European Parliament has given the green light for two new regulations, the GM food/feed regulation and the regulation on traceability of GMOs. The new rules are expected to receive final approval in the autumn and take effect early next year.

Although the European Commission has hailed the decision as giving consumers greater confidence in the safety of GM products, the move will effectively clear the way for the lifting of the EU's five year moratorium on approving new GMOs. Greenpeace said the vote would give the EU "the world's strictest and most comprehensive rules on the labelling of GM organisms".

But yesterday's decision is unlikely to satisfy Washington, which has challenged the EU's de facto moratorium on GM and insists that mandatory labelling of biotech products will be too costly for exporters and may constitute a new form of trade protection.

The rules include:

- Mandatory pre-marketing authorisation of all food and feed products which contain, consist of or have been produced from GMOs
- Post-marketing monitoring of environmental effects. The monitoring of

effects on human health may also be required

- Mandatory labelling for all GM food and feed, including all GM food and feed of GMO origin, irrespective of the detectability of DNA or protein, that contains an ingredient made up of 0.9% or more GM material
- GM food and feed must be traceable from farmer to table to facilitate the monitoring and, where necessary, the withdrawal of GM products as well as the control of compliance with the labelling requirements

However, the Commission has compromised on new rules concerning genetic contamination and liability. Member States will be allowed to determine their own appropriate measures to avoid the unintended presence of GMOs in other products, although the Commission has published recommendations to ensure co-existence of GM and non-GM crops.

MEP Caroline Lucas has produced a briefing called Towards a GM-free Europe. For more information see www.carolinelucas-mep.org.uk or call 020 7407 6281 for a copy.

Carrie Stebbings

...news...

Meacher piles on pressure

Former Environment Minister Michael Meacher was sacked in a Cabinet Reshuffle on Friday 13th June and has been replaced by Elliot Morley. Meacher has certainly been fulfilling his promise to campaign actively on GM from the backbenches by repeatedly challenging the Government to justify its pro-GM stance.

Bové in prison again

The French small farmers' leader and anti-globalisation campaigner, José Bové, has been sentenced to a 10-month jail sentence for destroying genetically modified crops, his third spell in prison in four years.

Cartagena Protocol ratified

The Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, the UN Treaty that seeks to protect the environment from the potential risks of GMOs will officially become law on 11th September 2003.

CODEX approves guidelines on GM food safety

The Codex Alimentarius Commission, the highest international body on food standards and a subsidiary body of FAO and WHO, has adopted ground-breaking guidelines for assessing the food safety risks posed by foods derived from biotechnology, including GMOs.

Lake District National Park goes GM-Free

The Lake District National Park Authority became the first National Park to vote to go GM-free. Shropshire, Cumbria and Somerset County Councils and Ryedale District Council have also recently voted to stay GM-Free. See www.gmfreebritain.com

Stay in touch! If you don't normally receive this bi-monthly newsletter and would like to, please send £5 (to cover costs, made payable to Five Year Freeze) to **Five Year Freeze, 94 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF**

Strategy Unit costs study and GM Science Review published

'Field Work: Weighing up the Costs and Benefits of GM crops' was published by the Government's Strategy Unit on 11th July and was followed by the 'GM Science Review' on 21st July. Both reports form part of the GM Nation? public debate and will help inform Government policy decisions on GM. Campaigning organisations have welcomed the reports as being more cautious about the introduction on GM crops than had been anticipated.

The Strategy Unit report is published on: <http://www.number10.gov.uk/output/Page3673.asp> Tel: 020 7276 1881

The main conclusions of the report were:

- existing GM crops could offer some cost and convenience advantages to UK farmers;
- however, any economic benefit to the UK is likely to be limited, at least in the short-term - only a narrow range of existing GM crops are currently suited to UK conditions, and weak consumer demand is likely to limit take-up;
- looking to the longer term, future developments in GM crops have the potential to offer more wide-ranging benefits, to farmers and to consumers
- possibilities include GM crops with agronomic benefits more suited to the UK; GM crops delivering direct health benefits (e.g. delivering foods with reduced allergenicity or added nutrients); or non-food GM crops used as a source of pharmaceuticals and vaccines;
- however, the overall balance of future costs and benefits will depend on public attitudes, and on the ability of the regulatory system to manage uncertainties.

The Strategy Unit has invited comments on the report, and responses should be sent to GM Crops Team, Strategy Unit, Cabinet Office, 4th Floor Admiralty Arch, The Mall, London SW1A 2WH. Or email: GMCrops@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk to arrive by **Friday 17th October**.

The GM Science Review is published on: <http://www.gmsciencedebate.org.uk/>

Despite concluding that "on balance the risks to human health are very low for GM crops currently on the market" the Review's Executive Summary lists many areas where there are gaps in current scientific knowledge. The review reveals the depth of uncertainties surrounding GM crops and foods and the lack of systems for detecting harm to human health. It also

action...action...action

The success of GM crops rests on whether the public will buy them or not. Keep up the pressure on your local supermarkets by writing to the Manager to say that you will not buy products made from GM ingredients. Nor will you buy meat or dairy products from animals fed on GM crops, and you will shop elsewhere if the supermarket stocks GM products.

highlights how future developments in GM have even greater potential to cause damage to human health or the environment, and how our lack of knowledge will make accurate predictions about environmental impacts very difficult.

The Five Year Freeze has been calling for more research in to the implications of GM food and crops and this report supports our view that we do not have enough information to make a decision.

The Review Panel has invited comments on the report. Their web site will remain open to receive them over the summer. All contributions must be submitted by **15 October 2003**. See the website for guidelines on commenting. <http://www.gmsciencedebate.org.uk/>

Send your comments by e-mail to forum@gmsciencedebate.org.uk - please use, as the subject line, "Comment on first report".

Carrie Stebbings

Science Review member threatened

Dr Andy Stirling from Sussex University and a member of the Government's GM Science panel has alleged that secret moves were made by a senior pro-GM scientist to sabotage his career because of his sceptical stance on GM crops and food.

Dr Stirling has refused to disclose the name of the scientist involved. Regardless of who it was, this is another example of unacceptable pressure on scientists who express caution about GMOs.

The Freeze will be writing to Professor Sir David King and others to protest about Dr Stirling's experience in the strongest terms.

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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, 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, Pro-natural Food Scotland, Resurgence, Scientists for Global Responsibility, Scottish Beekeepers Association, 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, Vincere 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.