

Freeze Update

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

The need for a Freeze continues

Looking forward this time last year it was hard to imagine where the GM debate might be at this point. The Field Scale Evaluation results would have been published, the Strategy Unit's review of the economics of GM crops concluded, the review of scientific evidence presented and the public debate done and dusted.

Judging on past performance, it was easy to imagine that the trial crops would receive a clean bill of health, the Strategy Unity would have concluded how important agricultural biotechnology is for UK economic prosperity, and the science review would have shown yet again how all our concerns are completely unfounded. All we could be fairly certain of was that public opinion would no doubt stay consistent with previous social research and opinion polling - however no-one anticipated what a resounding thumbs down the public would actually give to GM. The economics review concluded that there was little economic gain to be had from growing GM crops in

the UK in the immediate future, and the science review confirmed and identified uncertainties and gaps in our knowledge of the science of GM. Perhaps most surprising of all, two out of the three trial crops have been shown to be harmful to farmland wildlife.

All of these results vindicate the position taken by the Five Year Freeze and our supporting organisations over the last five years. We were right to question the weakness of the knowledge base underpinning GM crops, and to challenge whether the supposed benefits outweigh the risks. And there is now more justification than ever in maintaining the present moratorium policy.

It is anticipated that the Government will not make a policy pronouncement on GM until the beginning of 2004, at the earliest – it is not hard to imagine that delay might be the essence of the day. However – there is now no question that the science alone

indicates that at least GM oil seed rape and beet should be banned. And going on the rest of the evidence produced this summer, it would be madness for the Government to persist in pursuing the policy line that agricultural biotechnology is the saviour they once thought it might be.

Clare Devereux



Rachel Sutton, Clare Devereux and Carrie Stebbings from the Freeze (from left to right) prepare to join the Tractors and Trolleys protest – see back page for more photos.

Farm scale trials conclude that GM crops harm the environment

The field scale trials were set up in 1999 to investigate the impact of herbicide tolerant crops on biodiversity. The trials focused narrowly on the evaluation of whether the planting and management of GM herbicide resistant oilseed rape, maize, sugar beet and fodder beet is damaging to a number of species of wildlife.

Many doubts and concerns surrounded the trials, including the fact that the guidelines were inadequate and drawn up by SCIMAC, a biotech industry body. The trials were not looking at the impact on earthworms, soil fungi and bacteria essential to soil health, nor the impact on birdlife, and the results were based on one year's growth and so would not consider the long-term effects of growing GM.

The results of the trials were published by DEFRA on 16th October and show that if we grow herbicide tolerant oilseed rape or

beet in the UK, farmland biodiversity is likely to suffer. The results for GM maize showed it to be better than non-GM maize for biodiversity, but doubt has been cast on the validity of these results.

The weed killer used on the non-GM maize, atrazine, has been banned by the EU and is being withdrawn from the market because it is highly toxic, and therefore does not represent a real comparison with alternative maize growing methods. Conventional maize growing methods are known to be particularly damaging to the environment so it is not surprising that a marginally better result was found for maize.

There are also concerns that the maize results would not be replicated on working farms seeking to maximise the yields of maize, rather than weeds and insects. The trials were not about agronomic performance and didn't measure yields, so

were not representative of real commercial production. The trials did not address the fundamental question of the threat to organic and non-GM crops from gene-flow and cross pollination.

The Freeze welcomes the results of the trials and is calling for GM oilseed rape and sugar beet to be banned. However, it is important to remember that the trials are only one piece of the jigsaw when debating whether to commercialise GM crops or not.

The most important question, whether there is a need for GM crops, and if such a need justifies the potential risks their growing poses to the environment and to human and animal health, has still not been answered.

The results of the farm scale evaluations are available at www.defra.gov.uk/news/latest/2003/fsresults.htm or phone 08459 33 55 77.

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UK Co-existence and liability guidelines

As reported in the last newsletter, the EU has concluded that it will be up to individual member states to determine their own appropriate measures to ensure the co-existence of GM and non-GM crops and for ruling in disputes concerning contamination of non-GM crops. However, countries will not be obliged to put regulations in place.

The EU has produced non-binding guidelines for the development of national strategies to help members draw up their own regulations, if they choose to do so. In the UK the Agriculture and Environment Biotechnology Commission (AEBC) is already working on a draft report that would help to inform any UK guidelines.

The AEBC has been struggling to reach agreement on the draft report due to differences of opinion between representatives of the biotech industry and other members, over the need for and the remit of comprehensive regulations. However it is expected that it will recommend the UK adopts a statutory co-existence and liability regime.

Friends of the Earth are currently drafting a private member's bill on co-existence and liability which will highlight the strict measures that will be needed in the case of GM commercialisation. The Freeze will be actively supporting the development of this bill.

No-one will insure GM crops

FARM, the organisation campaigning for independent and family farms, has conducted a survey of insurance underwriters in the UK to see how many would be willing to insure farmers wanting to grow GM crops.

All of the companies surveyed felt that too little was known about the long term effects of growing GM crops on human health and the environment to be able to offer any cover.

You can get more information from www.farm.org.uk or call 020 7352 7928.

GM Food? No thanks!

GM Nation? report confirms public still have no appetite for GM food

The report of the GM Nation? public debate was published on 24th September and delivered a blow to any Government plans to introduce GM commercially to the UK.

The report is a qualitative analysis of the meetings and feedback forms from the two elements of GM Nation? that took place in June and July this year. The first element was the approximately 600 open meetings that were held across the country inviting the public to discuss and record their views. The second element, known as the "narrow-but-deep" was a research component based on a series of reconvened discussion groups. These involved selected members of the public, with no previous engagement with GM, with the aim of providing a more in-depth analysis, acting as a "control" for the information coming out of the open meetings and testing whether there really is a "silent majority" with significantly different views to the more vocal minority.

Key messages from the GM Nation? debate report

- People are generally uneasy about GM
- The more people engage in GM issues, the harder their attitudes and more intense their concerns
- There is little support for early commercialisation
- There is widespread mistrust of government and multi-national companies
- There is a broad desire to know more and for more research to be done
- Developing countries have special interests
- The debate was valued and welcomed

The main conclusion of the report is that people are generally uneasy about GM, with feelings ranging from caution and doubt, suspicion and scepticism, to hostility and rejection. The predominant mood of both groups is one of uncertainty and caution towards GM.

There is little support for early commercialisation of GM, with the majority calling for further trials and tests, firm regulation, a clearer demonstration of the benefits to society and above all, clear and

trusted answers to unresolved questions about health and the environment.

GM Nation? in numbers

- an estimated 675 meetings held
- 2.9 million hits on GM Nation? website
- 70,000 feedback forms sent out of which 36,557 were completed – 51 per cent in hard copy and 49 per cent on the website
- broad ratio of 5 "anti" GM responses to 1 "pro" GM
- 8% were happy with the idea of eating GM food. 86% were not.

The findings also confirm widespread mistrust of Government and multi-national companies on the GM issue and deep suspicion about the motives, intentions and behaviour of those taking decisions about GM.

Although overwhelmingly cautious about GM, participants in the "narrow-but-deep" component were less emphatic in their responses to questions than those who went to the open meetings. They were also more willing to accept that there might be some potential benefits, particularly for developing countries. However, the results from these groups highlighted the fact that the more people learn about GM, the more their attitudes harden against it, calling in to question the notion that people are only against GM because they are ignorant of the facts involved.

The Government is now in an awkward position as it tries to balance the results of a report that it funded, showing massive public opposition to GM, with the powerful interests of the biotech industry and trade relations with the United States. It remains to be seen which way they will choose to tip the balance.

You can get a copy of the report by phoning 0870 1502500 and quoting GM Nation? URN 03/1292 or by emailing that reference and your postal address to publications@dti.gsi.gov.uk or at www.gm-nation.org.uk

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**

Problems of GM Soya in Argentina revealed

Argentina, once known as one of the world's leading beef producers and the 'breadbasket of the world', is now often referred to as the 'Oil Republic' or 'Soya Republic', due to the way it has turned to the production and export of GM soya to help repay its enormous national debt.

The policy has undermined food security and has turned Argentina from a country once self-sufficient in food to a food importer. The effect can be seen in the disappearance of thousands of farming units, with consequent massive rural exodus to the cities as small-scale rural farmers are displaced from the land; a large increase in the area of land devoted to agriculture at the cost of grazing cattle; an increase of oilseed production, mainly soya, at the expense of traditional crops, and deforestation.

Furthermore, the increase in production of glyphosate-resistant Roundup-Ready (RR) soya since 1996 has caused an increase in the use of herbicide due to the emergence of resistant weeds, as well as other pesticides and fertilisers. Despite frequent warnings against a RR soya monoculture,

millions of hectares have been devoted to this oilseed. Currently Argentina is the worlds No. 3 soya producer and this season a record production of 34.9 million tons is expected.

Environmental impacts

Environmental problems emerging include: weeds acquiring resistance to glyphosate (Roundup) at the recommended concentrations; increased use of herbicides, including some banned in North America and Europe, and continuous nutrient extraction from the soil leading to nitrogen and phosphorus deficiency.

Added to this, the populations of many rural towns are suffering health problems due to widespread aerial spraying of the GM soya crops, as well as health and development problems in young children now dependent on soya as their staple food.

Stella Semina, Grupo Reflexión Rural, Argentina. For more information you can contact Stella at stella.semino@mail.dk or phone 020 8673 3502

The US challenge to the EU at the World Trade Organisation

The US, Canada and Argentina are pushing ahead with their challenge against the EU moratorium on GM. The parties failed to reach an early agreement to the dispute by negotiation and so a panel of trade experts is currently being appointed to hear evidence from both sides and subsequently make a ruling.

At stake in this challenge are our rights to prioritise environmental and health protection ahead of free trade and our right to choose what we eat. The Freeze believes that the WTO has no place in decisions about GM and is working on evidence to submit to the WTO dispute settlement panel in support of the EU case.

action...action...action

Read more about this, and how you can protest, in the WTO briefing enclosed. Copies also available on the Freeze website at www.fiveyearfreeze.org and from the Freeze office on 0207 837 0642

Ruling on GM-free Austria will not affect British campaign

In September the EU ruled that Upper Austria could not declare itself a blanket GM-free Zone. Friends of the Earth have confirmed that UK authorities can still apply for their own GM free zones under Article 19 of the Deliberative Release Directive 2001/18/EC.

Under Article 19 particular geographical areas or habitats/ ecological zones can be excluded from GM marketing consents on a case by case basis provided the environmental case can be made to support each application. Upper Austria's failed bid used different regulations.

To date 16 local authorities have voted to use Article 19 to get GM crops excluded from their areas – Cornwall, Somerset, South Somerset, South Gloucestershire, Shropshire, Cumbria, Warwickshire, Rydale, South Hams, York, East Riding, Lancashire, Brighton and Hove, Bristol City Council, the Welsh National Assembly and the Lake District National Parks Authority.

Five year
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...news...

DEFRA report reveals extent of pollen transfer

The Government has published new research showing that GM oilseed rape has cross-pollinated with non-GM rape at distances of more than 16 miles. This is more than six times the distance previously documented. Further research has also revealed that GM oilseed rape seed remains viable in the soil for up to 16 years.

Greenpeace targets Sainsbury's

Greenpeace's latest GM campaign "something scary in the dairy" is targeting Sainsbury's for selling milk from cows fed on imported GM crops. You can get more information from www.greenpeace.org.uk/GMmilk.htm or call 020 7865 8100

action...action...action

Joan Ruddock MP has tabled an Early Day Motion (EDM) (No. 1774 Genetically Modified Crops) calling for an urgent parliamentary debate on growing GM crops in the UK. Please contact your MP and urge him/her to sign it. An EDM is a parliamentary petition highlighting MP's support for an issue. Find out who your MP is and their contact details at www.locata.co.uk/commons/ or by calling 020 7219 4272.

new reports

Engineering Nutrition: GM crops for global justice? From The Food Ethics Council by calling 01273 766654 or www.foodethicscouncil.org

GM Crops Industry Overview: the big three prepare to commercialise Available from Corporate Watch at www.corporatewatch.org.uk or phone 01865 791391

GM Crops: Sorting the Wheat from the Chaff. Available from FARM by calling 020 7352 7928 or at www.farm.org.uk

Tractors and Trolleys call at No.10



Over 1000 people, some pushing decorated supermarket trolleys, joined the Tractors and Trolleys parade in central London on 13th October to demand that the Government reject GM crops and keep Britain's harvest GM-free. Up to 20 individuals undertook personal pilgrimages to London by foot, bike and tractor from as far a field as Landsend, Inverness, Pembrokeshire and Newcastle to take part in the parade.



Pembrokeshire farmer Gerald Miles drove his tractor over 300 miles to head the parade

The protest was led by 5 tractors and a samba band and made it's way down Shaftesbury Avenue to the offices of the National Farmers' Union where messages of opposition to GM were handed in, then on to Downing Street where the Freeze handed in it's petition of 70,000 signatures calling for a ban on GM.

Friends of the Earth handed in 13,000 messages of opposition, the National Federation of Women's Institutes handed in over 500 personal letters of opposition and the organisation FARM handed in a wreath signifying the death of pub-



The Freeze trolley with our 70,000 signature petition.



The march heads towards Whitehall.



Freeze Director Clare Devereux hands over the petition to an unsuspecting Downing Street official.

lic trust in farming if GM is commercialised. From there the march went on to the offices of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, where more messages of opposition were handed in.

The day finished with a harvest festival tea and a rally chaired by the Freeze's Clare Devereux. Speakers included three of the pilgrims, Gerald Miles, Barbara Charvet and Liz Snook, as well as the international campaigner Dr Vandana Shiva, former Environment Minister Michael Meacher and Friends of the Earth Director Tony Juniper.



Carrie from the Freeze hands over more of the petition amidst a media scrum.

The atmosphere was upbeat and celebratory and the speakers outlined how much the campaign has achieved so far and how this is a critical moment to keep up the pressure on Government, the biotech industry and the supermarkets.

More photos are available on our website at www.fiveyearfreeze.org



and finally ... You'd better watch out - there could be something scary in the dairy!

The Supporters of The Five Year Freeze are:

Action Aid, Action Against Allergy, Additives Survivors' Network, African Initiatives, 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, Network 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.