

# Freeze Update



## Government announcement on GM imminent

The Five Year Freeze campaign will be five years old this February. Thanks to our supporters the campaign has been hugely successful and five years after our launch GM crops are still not being grown commercially in the UK, no new crops have received commercial consent, no new GM foods have been approved and GM foods and ingredients have virtually disappeared from our shops. New and greatly improved EU labelling and traceability laws are about to be introduced. Internationally, the Freeze has inspired the creation of similar campaigns in India, Brazil, South Africa, Kenya and other nations.

At our AGM last month the Rt. Hon. Michael Meacher M.P. congratulated the Freeze and our supporters on this success. He emphasised how fundamental the alliance has been in keeping the UK GM-

### Thanks ....

Many thanks to everyone who responded so generously to our appeal for funds last October. We had a wonderful response from our supporters and we now have funds to keep us going for another six months.

free for so long and how vital it is to carry on campaigning to achieve our goals.

The AGM also saw Freeze supporters give unanimous support for a continuation of our work beyond our fifth birthday and the Steering Group is now looking in to how we can best achieve this.

If reports are true then our birthday will coincide with the Government's decision on whether or not it will allow commercial growing of GM crops in the UK. An announcement is believed to be imminent and it is expected that GM maize will get the go-ahead, all be it under strict conditions. In the meantime the Government has done nothing to introduce laws to protect consumer and farmer choice and ensure the liability of the biotech industry if anything goes wrong (See over for news on the GMO Bill and how you can support it).

The Freeze believes that we still do not have enough evidence to justify a decision in favour of GM crops, and in fact the evidence we do have clearly highlights the need for a continued moratorium and a lot

more research in to health and environmental impacts.

We are currently producing a statement that clearly lays out why we are continuing to call for a moratorium, and we will circulate this to all our supporters in February.

In the meantime we have written to the Prime Minister laying out our opposition to commercialisation of GM crops and assuring him that we will continue to work towards a moratorium on GM in the UK. Whatever the Government decides, the fight isn't over yet!

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

**We have to keep the pressure on Tony Blair. Please write to him expressing your concern that the Government may be about to commercialise GM crops for growing in the UK and calling for a continued moratorium. You can use the enclosed Freeze letter as a model if you want to. Call Carrie on 020 7837 0642 if you need a copy.**

## ACRE advises Government on the results of the FSEs.

The Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment (ACRE) has been considering the results of the farm scale evaluations (FSEs) since they were published in October 2003. On 13th January ACRE published their conclusions on the three GM herbicide-tolerant crops. Their advice will now help to inform the Governments policy decision on GM, expected to be announced in the next few weeks.

When announcing the conclusions Jules Pretty, deputy chairman of Acre said *"In a sense, we are saying 'yes, but' to the maize and 'no, but' to both the beet and the spring-sown oilseed rape. That is not 'yes, yes, no'. That is very important."*

Concerning the individual crops, ACRE advised the following:

**Beet and Spring-sown oilseed rape** – If GM beet and oilseed rape were to be grown and managed as in the FSEs this would result in adverse effects on arable weed populations compared with conventionally managed beet and oilseed rape. The effects on arable weeds would be likely to result in adverse effects on wildlife such as farmland birds, compared with conventionally managed equivalent crops.

**Maize** – If GM maize were to be grown and managed as in the FSEs this would result in adverse effects, compared with conventionally managed maize. ACRE advised that the crop would have to be grown and managed in exactly the same way as it was in the FSEs and that further work needs to be done on the implications

of the new EU ban on the herbicide Atrazine, that was used on the conventional maize crop in the FSEs and is now being withdrawn because of fears over its safety.

ACRE emphasised that their conclusions only apply to the management regime used in the FSEs and that alternative management strategies may have different impacts. They suggested that there may be viable mitigation measures that could be used by farmers to offset any adverse effects.

You can get a copy of ACRE's full advice at [www.defra.gov.uk/environment/acre/fse](http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/acre/fse) or by writing to: ACRE Secretariat, Zone 3/G9, Ashdown House, 123 Victoria Street, London, SW1E 6DE

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

Tel: 020 7837 0642. Fax: 020 7837 1141

Email: [enquiry@fiveyearfreeze.org](mailto:enquiry@fiveyearfreeze.org) Web: [www.fiveyearfreeze.org](http://www.fiveyearfreeze.org)

# Gregory Barker MP adopts GMO Bill

After being drawn in the Private Members Ballot on 4th December 2003, Gregory Barker, Conservative MP for Bexhill and Battle, received



hundreds of letters from Five Year Freeze and Friends of the Earth supporters asking him to adopt a Bill on GMOs. Here Mr Barker explains why he was happy to adopt the GMO Bill.

Like many members of the public I find it extraordinary that the huge controversy surrounding the planting of GM Crops and the massive public response to last years GM Nation? debate, has been met with a deafening silence from the government. Despite the terrific public interest in this issue in the country, there has not been a single debate on the subject in government time in the main chamber of the House of Commons. However, with the government seemingly determined to drive ahead and allow further planting of GM Crops in our country, something has to be done to put a check on those who could irrevocably contaminate the British environment.

In December, I was fortunate enough to be drawn in the Private Members Ballot to introduce a Bill to Parliament this year. With the help of Friends of the Earth and the Five Year Freeze, on 26th March I will present "The Genetically Modified Crops Bill" to the House of Commons. In essence my Bill aims to set controls on the release of genetically modified organisms to prevent them contaminating other crops and areas of countryside, to set a liability regime for harm caused by the planting of genetically modified crops and so both protect our environment and preserve the choice of UK consumers who don't want to eat GM contaminated food.

It is important to note that nothing in the Bill in anyway promotes or condones the planting of genetically modified crops but it does urgently recognise that for good or ill, in the UK GM planting is already a reality. My Bill will cut through the legal maze that currently surrounds GM crops, as it sets out clear rules as to who is responsible for their consequences. This will in turn protect the rights of consumers and safeguard the livelihoods of conventional and organic farmers, who while still

at risk from cross contamination, will at least have the knowledge that their crops cannot be contaminated without recourse to the huge multi-national bio-technology companies that stand to profit from the spread of GM.

However if the government sets its face against this Bill it will stand next to no chance of making it onto the statute books. So I shall be endeavouring to persuade the government of the merit of this legislation. The Environment Minister Elliot Morley recently agreed with me, when he was giving evidence to the Environmental Audit Committee that rules were needed to prevent contamination and to establish a coherent liability regime. As this is exactly the aim of the Bill, it is hard to see how the Government could disagree to it going on to Committee for further debate. Sadly, experience shows that without strong public pressure, the government will do little to help Private Members Bills. However, we have already gathered terrific cross-party support from an excellent selection of MPs, which I hope will continue to grow over the coming weeks. It is vital that the public continue to lobby both the government and their M.P. to support this Bill. If we can mobilise the same level of interest that there was in the GM Nation? Debate last year, the Government will have no alternative but to listen.

For further details about the Bill please see [www.gregorybarker.com](http://www.gregorybarker.com)

## Belgians advise against growing GM oil seed rape

Belgian ministers have rejected an application to grow GM oil seed rape commercially throughout Europe. The application from Bayer Crop Science was turned down after research from the UK Farm Scale Evaluations showed that growing the crop would damage the environment. The Belgian ministers have forwarded the application to all member states for a joint decision. It is likely that ministers across Europe will vote in line with the Belgian recommendations.

In a separate development the EU gave it's backing to a proposal to allow a type of GM maize (known as BT11) to be imported as food in to Europe.

You can get a briefing on this from at [www.foeeurope.org/GMOs/Index.htm](http://www.foeeurope.org/GMOs/Index.htm) or by calling Friends of the Earth on 0207 490 1555.



## The GMO Bill – what happens next?

Now that the Bill has been adopted the next stage is the Second Reading on **Friday 26th March** when the Bill will be debated and Parliament must decide whether or not to give support to the main principles of the Bill. Only if we reach the Committee Stage will we get a *full and proper debate*. The most effective way to make this happen is if the Government comes under intense pressure from constituents.

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

#### Write a letter to your MP

- Ask them to support the Genetically Modified Organisms Bill;
- Even if they have concerns about the detail of the legislation, stress that you hope they will support the Bill receiving a *full and proper debate* in Parliament, by doing all they can to ensure it reaches the Committee Stage. At the very least, ask your MP to assure you they will not obstruct the Bill.
- Ask them to sign Early Day Motion 462 Genetically Modified Organisms: Preserving consumer choice.
- Ask them to write a letter to Rt. Hon. Margaret Beckett, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, expressing support for the Bill and its *full and proper debate*.

If you don't know who your MP is, you can find out at [www.locata.co.uk/commons/](http://www.locata.co.uk/commons/) or by calling 020 7219 4272.

#### Write a letter to the Rt. Hon. Margaret Beckett, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

- Ask her to ensure the Genetically Modified Organisms Bill receives a *full and proper debate*, by allowing it through to Committee Stage.

Send letters to: House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA.