

# Freeze Update



## A time of change as the Freeze turns five

**T**he Freeze celebrated its fifth birthday in February - a landmark for the alliance - and an opportunity to reassess our future. As agreed overwhelmingly at the AGM in January, the campaign is now set to continue, probably with a change of name (watch this space!).

So, as the Freeze enters a new phase it is an appropriate time to hand the baton over - and this is my last newsletter working at the Freeze. It has been an incredible five years, with so many highs and lows, frustrations and celebrations. But it feels a good time to be moving on and so much has been achieved since the early days of the Freeze.

The most important thing for me is that so many of the concerns raised by the Freeze at the beginning, which were then denied, or even ridiculed, by industry and Government, are now recognized to be

legitimate. And most importantly, we have managed to defer commercial planting for the last five years. Only last month Bayer announced they were withdrawing Chardon LL, the maize crop most likely to receive the green light for planting in the near future. So we are unlikely to see any commercial planting here in the UK for at least another year or two.



However, we must not be complacent, and we need to keep up the pressure. Which is why I am delighted that my post will be taken over by Pete Riley, who has been Senior GM Campaigner at Friends of the Earth since 1999.

Pete has an incredible knowledge of GM and broader food and agriculture issues, as well as formidable political and media savvy. His expertise will carry the Freeze forward into a new and exciting phase, ably assisted by Carrie Stebbings, who will continue as Campaign Coordinator.

I wish them both, and the Freeze, best of luck for the future.

Clare Devereux

## Government says yes, senior MPs and Bayer say no....

On Tuesday 9th March Margaret Beckett, Secretary of State for Environment, made the historic announcement that, having weighed up all the evidence, the British Government had decided to allow the conditional growing of GM maize in the UK countryside. Mrs Beckett effectively ignored advice from the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee (EAC) published on 5th March in a report evaluating the Field Scale Trials, which concluded that "the scope of the trials was very narrow and the results cannot be regarded as adequate grounds for a decision to be taken in favour of commercialisation".

People all over the country were dismayed as it looked like GM maize could be planted in 2005, and campaigners began gearing up for a renewed fight. Then three weeks later on 31st March, Bayer CropScience announced that it was

discontinuing further efforts to commercialise its GM forage maize variety, Chardon LL, in the UK because it said that the conditions laid out by Mrs Beckett in her announcement would make the crop economically non-viable. As this was the only GM maize variety to have cleared most of the regulatory hurdles in the UK the Bayer announcement effectively meant that no GM crops could be grown here for another 2 or 3 years.

There is no doubt that this is a major victory for everyone who has campaigned against GM over the last 7 years. However, Bayer has stated that it remains highly committed to the further development of plant biotechnologies in the UK. In April Dr Julian Little, spokesman for Bayer, was quoted as saying that "we expect GM oil seed rape to be harvested in the fields of

Cambridgeshire before the end of the decade".

On 5th May the EAC published the Government's response to its original 5th March report and accused the Government of "wilful or careless misinterpretations" and of failing to address many of the points that the EAC raised, including liability for contamination of non-GM crops and that the field scale trials were a very narrow part of the Government's consultation.

Whoever the Government is listening to, it certainly isn't the EAC or the public. It seems clear from these events that although we have won a victory on the GM maize, the threats from future GM crops and from GM products being imported in to the UK are still very real. It would be dangerous to be complacent now, as so much is still to be decided.

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# The Freeze celebrates five years!



## ...news...

### EU moratorium on GM imports holds, despite UK government efforts

In a vote on 30th April EU member states failed to reach a majority vote to support an application by Monsanto to import a GM maize known as NK603 for human food. In February member states failed to support the same GM crop for use as an animal feed. The decision will now go to Council of Ministers for a vote. Britain is backing the move to approve the corn, which would effectively end the EU moratorium on new licences for GM food.

In an earlier meeting in Luxembourg on 26th April Europe's agriculture ministers failed to agree approval of a new genetically modified corn to be sold in the EU. Swiss firm Syngenta's GM insect-resistant crop BT-11 was rejected by the EC's regulatory committee in December last year. Now that it has also been rejected by ministers the decision will be handed back to the European Commission, which is expected to approve it despite doubts about its safety.

## New books

### Seeds of Deception

'Exposing Corporate and Government Lies about the Safety of Genetically Engineered Food'

Jeffrey M. Smith. Published in April 2004 by Green Books (01803 864013). ISBN 1 903998 41 7. £9.95

### Hungry Corporations

'Transnational Biotech Companies Colonise the Food Chain'

Helena Paul and Ricarda Steinbrecher with Devlin Kuyek and Lucy Michaels. Zed Books (020 7837 4014). ISBN 1 84277 301 1. £15.95.

To celebrate our birthday, we asked some of the people who have been involved with the campaign against GM for their thoughts about what the Freeze has meant to them. Here are their responses.

*"As Environment Minister I was always aware of the Freeze coalition as a major force, bearing in mind the combined power of its supporters.*

*There is no doubt that the Freeze played a major role in GM politics in the UK and that its role in the future will be equally important. There is still much work for the Freeze to do."*

**Rt. Hon Michael Meacher M.P.**  
**Minister of State for Environment**  
**1997 - 2003.**

*"It was my pleasure and privilege to have been part of the launch of the Five Year Freeze Campaign in London.*

*The movements that went before to create the political context for a call for the Freeze and the movements that have grown since then are in my view the most important freedom movements of our time. The choice of citizens and local authorities to declare GMO free zones is a new dimension of GMO freedom as peoples freedom.*

*The success of the Five Year Freeze Campaign is clear in the fact that Europe is not flooded with GMO's.*

*This is a global fight and what happens in Europe will influence what happens all over the world and so we have to continue to work together to be sure that we win."*

**Dr Vandana Shiva, internationally renowned physicist, ecologist, activist and author.**

**Ben Nash, cartoonist and local campaigner from Forest Row, Sussex**

*"With its simple message and wide coalition the Freeze has been the vital backdrop to all the anti GM campaigns in Britain. With the growing of GM crops halted at least for the moment, the fight against GM animal feed and food must continue and the Freeze campaign has an essential role to play."*

**Joan Ruddock, M.P. for Lewisham and Chair of GLOBE UK, the all-party sustainable development group.**

*"GM crops would have been growing in the UK countryside from 1998 if the biotechnology industry had had its way. The fact that they are not is the result of a very widely supported campaign engaging a huge diversity of groups.*

*The Five Year Freeze has been central to bringing those groups together and keeping the countryside free of GM crops as the public wants."*

**Dr Sue Mayer, Executive Director, GeneWatch UK**

*"We aimed to give a voice to people who didn't want GM but who felt they wouldn't be heard. We wanted the campaign to be as inclusive and diverse as possible. It's great that we were successful for the first five years - now we just have to keep going for another five...."*

**Helena Paul, Founding Chair of the Five Year Freeze.**

# WTO hears evidence on GM

In May 2003 the U.S, Canada and Argentina launched a complaint against the EU at the WTO. The US is angry about the EUs de facto moratorium on trade in GMOs, in place since the late 1990s, and argues that the moratorium was not based on scientific evidence, is not consistent with WTO rules and has cost the US millions of dollars in lost trade.

It has taken some months for the EU and the US to agree on the three members of the panel that will hear evidence on the case and make a ruling, but the panel is now in place and the process has started again. The US submitted its evidence to the panel in early April and the EU has to make its submission before 17th May with the final report and the panel's decision expected later in the year. The whole process is usually closed to the public and all submissions and reports are confidential. Due to the interest in this case there are rumours that the hearings might take place in public for the first time.

The Freeze has joined up with GeneWatch UK, the Foundation for International

Environmental Law and Development (FIELD) and the RSPB to bring together a coalition of organisations representing a range of public interests from around the world. The coalition is currently producing an amicus brief (or 'friend of the court') to submit to the panel to support the EUs case and make sure that civil society concerns are heard in the dispute.

The amicus will focus on core issues including: why the EU moratorium is justified; the importance of the Precautionary Principle; the relevance of other international agreements and the reasons why GMOs should be strictly regulated.

The Freeze will be involved in events in May and June to publicise the amicus with the media and with GMO policy decision makers to raise awareness of the WTO dispute. We will keep you informed of progress but watch out for coverage in the media as the case gathers pace.

## EU labelling laws fail to give real choice

On 18th April 2004 new, stricter labelling laws for GM food came in to force across Europe. The new laws state that:

- All food ingredients derived from GM crops where the GM content of the raw product exceed 0.9% have to be labelled, including ingredients with no detectable GM DNA such as vegetable oil, starch, flavourings or emulsifiers.
- All GM ingredients in animal feed now have to be labelled if they exceed 0.9%
- Unauthorised GMOs which have received a favourable safety assessment from the EU are permitted up to a 0.5% limit without labelling. Above 0.5% would not be allowed on the market.

The new laws still do not provide consumers with a genuine GM-free choice as food accidentally containing small amounts (up to 0.9%) of GM will not have to be labelled, nor will the products of animals fed GM feed, like milk, meat and eggs.

The majority of UK supermarkets and food manufacturers are continuing to reject GM ingredients in their own brand products, but you may now notice imported products labelled as containing GM derivatives, such as lecithin. These did not have to be labelled as GM before, but now do.

Both Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace have launched campaigns designed to force supermarkets to eliminate all GM ingredients down to the lowest levels of detection (0.1%) and to end the practice of using GM animal feed in the production of animal products. Currently three quarters of all imported GM soya is being fed to pigs, cows and poultry, the products from which enter the food chain.

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

**Report any GM-labelled food that you find in stores to either Greenpeace or Friends of the Earth at the contact details below. We must let retailers know that we refuse to eat GM and make sure that these products are taken off the shelves.**

**Greenpeace Trolley Watch campaign see: <http://weblog.greenpeace.org/ge/action.html> or call 020 7865 8100.**

**Friends of the Earth's GM Zero Tolerance campaign see: [http://www.foe.co.uk/campaigns/real\\_food/press\\_for\\_change/gm\\_labelling/](http://www.foe.co.uk/campaigns/real_food/press_for_change/gm_labelling/) or call 020 7490 1555.**

...news...

## Venezuela to ban GM crops

President Hugo Chavez Frias of Venezuela has reportedly announced that the cultivation of GM crops will be prohibited on Venezuelan soil. The decision will probably lead to the cancellation of a contract with Monsanto to plant up to 500,000 acres of GM soybeans in Venezuela. President Chavez emphasised the importance of food sovereignty and security as the basis of his decision.

## Resistance grows in USA

Voters in Mendocino County, California have approved the nation's first ban on the raising and keeping of GM crops or animals. Although no known GM crops are grown in the area, Mendocino's organic growers have said they will use the law as a marketing tool, especially in Europe.

In Montpelier, Vermont, Senators voted to support the Farmer Protection Act, a bill to hold biotech corporations liable for unintended contamination of conventional or organic crops by GM plant materials. The bill was described as a pre-emptive strike to stop predatory lawsuits against Vermont's family farmers by biotech companies like Monsanto. Vermont has also become the first US state to require manufacturers of GM seeds to label and register their products.

## GM-Free zones spread

Friends of the Earth's GM-Free Britain campaign is continuing to gain momentum, with over 44 councils declaring their areas GM-free. For more information see [www.gmfreebritain.com](http://www.gmfreebritain.com) or call Friends of the Earth on 0113 242 8153

## Parliament stays GM-free

Tony Blair might want to force us to eat GM, but it seems that the House of Commons is staying GM-free. In response to a parliamentary question from Norman Baker MP, the Catering Committee confirmed that due to consumer concern, its policy is to avoid the procurement of foods that contain GMOs....

## Government consultation

There will be a Government consultation this summer covering co-existence and liability. This is already shaping up to be controversial, so watch this space on how you can get involved...

# Government tries to scupper GM Bill

**Gregory Barker M.P. explains the strange goings-on in Parliament on 26th March, what it meant for the GMO Bill and what happens next...**

At almost precisely midday on the last Friday in March, the House of Commons began debating my Genetically Modified Organisms Bill. Fifteen minutes later, the debate was over, cut short by Labour MPs using an obscure Parliamentary device to block further discussion.



What happened was that a backbench Labour MP, Andrew Dismore (Hendon), called for the House of Commons to sit in secret session. Such a call always requires an instant vote, and at least 40 MPs must take part in that vote if the debate is to continue. However, in a deliberate attempt to scupper the Bill, the vast majority of Labour MPs present in the Commons abstained. As a result, the Bill could not be debated further.

Given the potential consequences of releasing GM crops into the environment, this is a pretty terrible way for Parliament to debate the matter. But it wasn't just a few rogue backbenchers, blocking the Bill was fully supported by the Government. Numerous Ministers and Parliamentary Private Secretaries - people usually known as the "payroll vote" because they always vote the way the Government tells them to - were among the abstainers.

Since 1997, the Government has never called a debate on GM crops in its own time. The only debates that have taken place have been the result of backbench MPs raising the matter in Parliament. The Government has not brought forward new laws for Parliament to debate that would control the planting of GM crops, or establish who would be liable if things go wrong.

Yet GM is a matter of huge public interest, not just in my constituency, but across the whole UK. Thousands of people responded to the Government's consultation exercise "GM Nation?" and millions more have refused to buy the products - leading to every major retailer having refused to stock GM food.

In the end, the GMO Bill that I presented to Parliament was an extremely simple

one. I judged that the shortage of time for debates in Parliament would have led to a highly detailed Bill with all the separation distances and liability rules set out in detail running out of time. Instead, I

introduced a simple Bill that set out a process for all MPs to approve contamination and liability laws before any further planting of GM crops. Such laws would have to prevent contamination of non-GM and organic farms by GM crops, as well as ensuring that farmers who found their crops contaminated by GM traits could win compensation from the GM industry. The Bill was a moderate and common sense approach to dealing with a new technology that carries risks, and should have been supported even by those in favour GM. If they are as confident as they claim about the low risks, then they would have been happy to have necessary safety rules carefully scrutinised.

The Bill is now on the Commons agenda for the 14th May. It is the seventh Bill on the agenda that day, so there will probably be no time for a debate. The Bill can still go on to be considered by a Committee, but just one MP can prevent this by shouting "object". I hope this will not happen. But if it does, the only people who can put enough pressure on the Government to make them think again is you - voters and constituents.

Supporters of the Five Year Freeze have been a huge help in this debate so far. Thank you all for your support - and please do not give in.

## **action...action...action...**

**Please contact your MP and make sure they are not the MP that stops this Bill.**

**Ask them to confirm to you that they will not do anything to prevent the GMO Bill passing through Second Reading on May 14th.**

**You can find out your MPs contact details at [www.locata.co.uk/commons/](http://www.locata.co.uk/commons/) or by calling 020 7219 4272**



## **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, Campaign for the Protection of Rural Wales, 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.