

# Freeze Update



## US seeks to allow contamination of crops with experimental GM traits

**O**n 19th November 2004 the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced its new proposed draft guidelines to industry on dealing with inadvertent contamination of the food supply by unapproved GM material. (Guidance for Industry: Recommendations for the Early Food Safety Evaluation of New Non-Pesticidal Proteins Produced by New Plant Varieties Intended for Food Use).

The FDA acknowledges that the development of more GM crops in the future will mean a greater number of field trials, which in turn will mean increased risk of cross-pollination and contamination of food crops (GM or non-GM) already approved for commercial use by GM crops still undergoing trials.

At the moment the US regulatory system does not allow the presence of unapproved GM traits in food or feed. This means that companies have an incentive to manage contamination or face the possible expensive and inconvenient seizure or recall of products found to be contaminated. Rather than strengthen regulations to prevent GM contamination at all, the FDA is proposing to weaken the rules to allow it to happen, thus removing any incentive for companies to avoid contamination.

The new proposals allow companies to voluntarily perform a shortened and simpler safety assessment of genetic material from GM crops at an early stage of development. This limited review would be confidential and would give GM crop companies legal cover to allow these GM test crops to enter the US food

chain before a full pre-market safety review has taken place and a commercial license granted. No limit has currently been set for the levels of contamination that would be allowed.

As many of the experimental GM traits are in food crops such as maize, soy, rice and wheat which are exported in large quantities from the US, it is highly likely that contaminated food could be imported in to the UK.

Detecting and identifying these traits in food would be more difficult than approved traits as the majority of

experimental GM crops contain genes classified as confidential and labs would not have the GM templates needed to confirm exactly what is present.

The US Biotechnology Industry Organisation (BIO) is lobbying the US government to promote the global adoption of this policy to allow for a harmonised global approval system.

Comments on the new proposals are due at the FDA before 24th January 2005. It will still be very helpful to write to the Minister (see below) after the deadline.

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

We want the UK Government to object directly to the FDA. Please write to Melanie Johnson, the Minister for Public Health, also responsible for the Food Standards Agency, outlining your concerns. It would be worth copying your letter to Sir John Krebs, Chair of the FSA. Some main points to cover in your letter are:

- The proposed guidelines legalise contamination of the US food chain with unapproved and partially tested GM traits. Food and animal feed exports would be at risk.
- As the GM traits would be classed as commercially confidential by the companies and the GM templates needed for accurate analysis would not be available in Europe, this would make monitoring imports from the US very difficult.
- The rules would exempt biotechnology companies from responsibility for

harm or financial liability for allowing GM contamination of non-GM food and crops. Who would be liable if contaminated food was imported in to the UK and had negative impacts on human health and/or the economy?

- Ask the Minister to raise these concerns with the FDA directly
- Ask the Minister for a reply to your concerns

Rt Hon Melanie Johnson MP  
Department of Health  
Richmond House  
79 Whitehall  
London SW1A 2NL

Sir John Krebs, Food Standards Agency  
Aviation House  
125 Kingsway  
London WC2B 6NH

You can find more information on this issue at: [www.foei.org](http://www.foei.org)

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)



on genetic engineering and patenting in food and farming

### ...new reports...

#### **Throwing Caution to the Wind: A review of the European Food Safety Authority and its work on genetically modified foods and crops.**

Friends of the Earth Europe.

Available at

<http://www.foeeurope.org/GMOs/publications/EFSAreport.pdf> or call 020 7566 1716

#### **Insights 52: Debating GM crops.**

Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex.

<http://www.id21.org/insights/insights52/insights-iss52-art00.html> or call 01273 678787

#### **Just Knowledge? Governing research on food and farming.**

Food Ethics Council

<http://www.foodethicscouncil.org> or call 0845 345 8574

#### **Democratising Technology: Reclaiming science for sustainable development.**

Tom Wakeford, Intermediate

Technology Development Group

[http://www.itdg.org/docs/advocacy/democratising\\_technology\\_itdg.pdf](http://www.itdg.org/docs/advocacy/democratising_technology_itdg.pdf) or call 01926 634400

### ...new book...

#### **Genetically Modified Language. The discourse of arguments for GM crops and food.**

Guy Cook.

£12.99 Published by Routledge.

ISBN 0-415-31468-2

See [www.routledge.com](http://www.routledge.com)

The GM debate is a war of words, to be won as much by persuasion as by action in the laboratory, field or supermarket.

*Genetically Modified Language* cuts through the controversy to unpick the issues and ideology at the heart of the debate.

Guy Cook is Professor of Applied Linguistics at the University of Reading.

## Join the mass lobby of Parliament and say NO! to GM contamination

On Wednesday 23rd February the Freeze, Friends of the Earth, Farm and the National Federation of Women's Institutes have organised a rally and mass lobby of Parliament on GM contamination.

The theme of the day is scarecrows – the traditional protectors of crops. The aim is to meet your MP and ask them to support: our right to choose GM-free food; strict laws to prevent GM contamination; liability laws to ensure the biotech companies pay if anything goes wrong.

There will be a rally with inspirational speakers and an explanation of how the lobby system works mid-morning and then we will all head over to the House of Commons with our scarecrows to meet our MPs.

When you register for the event you will receive a lobby pack that tells you everything you need to know about the day and gives you all the facts you'll need to convince your MP to support you. There is also a chance to share transport with others coming from all over the country.

Unfortunately the scarecrows are not allowed in to the House of Commons (a high-level security risk, obviously), but there will be a supervised Scarecrow Park outside where you can leave and collect them. You might even be able to persuade your MP to come out and have their photo taken with you and your scarecrow for your local paper.

It's time to get our message across to MPs and demand they get off the fence when it comes to GM contamination. Pete, Carrie and our Freeze scarecrow look forward to seeing you there.

To register use the enclosed flier, log on to [www.gmfreescarecrows.org](http://www.gmfreescarecrows.org) or for call 020 7490 1555 for more information.

### Thank You

Many thanks to everyone who responded so generously to our appeal for funds in the last newsletter. We have some exciting work lined up for the year ahead to help us achieve our objectives and your support is vital to our success.

## The Future is not BRIGHT for GM

At the end of November, the results of the BRIGHT project on GM crops were published and these were used by its authors in an attempt to pave the way for the commercial approvals for oilseed rape and sugar beet in the UK.

It was claimed the BRIGHT project reversed the findings of the Farm Scale Evaluations published in 2003 and that GM crops were 'no worse' for farmland wildlife than conventional crops.

In fact, the project only served to highlight the damaging effects of intensive arable cropping on farmland wildlife, including GM, which are very well known already and confirmed the difficulties of containing GM crops and the potential for long term problems to develop, e.g. multi herbicide tolerant volunteer plants. It was examining the botanical and rotational implications of genetically modified herbicide tolerance in winter oilseed rape and sugar beet.

The original objective of the BRIGHT project back in 1999 was altered in February 2001 without any apparent explanation or change to the experimental design or methodologies employed.

In 1999 the aim was *to study the agricultural implications of including herbicide tolerant crops, including genetically modified varieties, in arable rotations*. By 2001 this had changed to:

*The project will provide scientific information on the environmental and agronomic impact of herbicide tolerant crops and develop strategies for their exploitation in sustainable farming systems.*

There were significant differences in the scope of BRIGHT and the FSEs – for instance BRIGHT only looked at weeds and did not cover insects and other invertebrates,

BRIGHT took place on four research farms and was funded by the biotech companies as well as the government. The main media spokesperson for the BRIGHT project, Dr Peter Lutman, is a member of the biotech industry funded CropGen panel of pro-GM scientists.

Far from giving GM crops the all clear, the project confirmed that their future should not be bright, but it will no doubt be used to justify the opposite conclusion...

# U.S Embassy refuses giant turkey

Remember those anti-GM thanksgiving turkey cards we sent out to you to colour in a few months ago? Well Friends of the Earth collected them all and made them in to a giant turkey to be presented to the US Embassy for President Bush in London on 24th November, the day before thanksgiving.

The message was clear: Stop using the World Trade Organisation to try to force feed us GM food.

However, it seems that the US Embassy is not interested in what UK

citizens think, as after having agreed in advance to accept the turkey



cards, on the day they refused to accept the giant turkey.

The US lodged its WTO complaint against the European Union de facto moratorium on GM crops in May 2003. A three person panel of trade experts is due to rule on the case in the spring, after consulting a panel of scientific experts, the identity of which is kept secret. A report is expected in June 2005, but there will probably be further delays.

In a further development, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) letter writers have joined the Freeze, the Women's Environmental Network and the National Federation of Women's Institutes in targeting the US, Canadian and Argentinean Embassies, demanding that they respect our rights and withdraw the complaint.

## DEFRA delays co-existence consultation 'until 2005'

We've been waiting, with baited breath, for months for DEFRA to launch its consultation on co-existence of GM and non-GM crops. First they said it would be out before the summer recess, then after the recess, then autumn, then before Christmas and now Eliot Morley has written to tell us that it will now not take place 'until 2005'.

The more cynical among us might be led to conclude that the issues involved are so complicated and controversial that DEFRA is having trouble working out how to present them and that nothing will appear until after a general election, expected in May, so that there is no focus for descent before the big day.

We believe that the starting point for co-existence rules must be the preservation of our right to farm and eat GM-free crops and food and the protection of the environment. If that means that separation distances are so wide that it makes it impractical to grow GM crops, then they should not be grown. DEFRA however, is starting from the point that GM crops should not be prevented from being grown in the U.K, and so the separation distances must be small

enough to make growing practical, even if that leads to widespread contamination.

The delay in publishing the consultation means that we now have more time to work on our MPs to support our call for zero tolerance on GM contamination. You can do this by joining us at the rally and mass lobby of Parliament on 23rd February (see page 2) and by asking your MP to sign a new Early Day Motion (EDM) on GMOs.

In November the German Parliament adopted its own tough new co-existence law that will hold GM farmers and operators financially liable for economic damage caused if their crops contaminate non-GM products. A register of intended GM releases in to the environment will also be publicly available.

However, in Holland a voluntary agreement has been reached between farmers' organisations and plant breeders. Consumer and environmental groups were not involved in the deal.

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

Contact your MP and ask them to sign EDM 406 Genetically Modified Organisms (see text below for your information). You can find out who your MP is and how to contact them at [www.locata.co.uk/commons/](http://www.locata.co.uk/commons/) or by calling 020 7219 4272. You can find out which MPs have already signed the EDM at <http://edm.ais.co.uk/weblink/html/motion.html/ref=406>

#### EDM 406

That this House notes the pressure exerted by the United States and biotech companies, especially through the GM dispute at the World Trade Organisation, to open European markets to GM products; is concerned this may lead to rushed decisions that deny consumer choice for GM-free food and leave farmers without compensation for GM contamination; further notes that EU law makes the drawing up of rules to avoid GM contamination the responsibility of national parliaments; and believes that before any further planting of genetically modified organisms, science-based rules for their release should be debated and approved by Parliament and the relevant national assemblies and that such rules should seek to prevent contamination of conventional and organic crops, preserve consumer choice and make GM consent holders liable for damage caused by their products.

# Beckett set to Abolish AEBC

The Environment Minister, Margaret Beckett is expected to announce the abolition of the Agriculture and Environment Biotechnology Commission (AEBC). It was set up in June 2000 as the Government's strategic advisory body on bio-tech issues affecting agriculture and the environment.

Led by Professor Malcolm Grant the AEBC brought balance to the debate about GM crops, looking at the wider ethical and social issues. It has expressed reservations about the role of GM and has insisted that non-GM and organic farmers should be protected from GM contamination and should be compensated if contamination occurs. It is perhaps for this reason that

the pro-GM Minister has decided to disband it and remove the opposition.

Dr Sue Mayer, Executive Director of GeneWatch UK, sits on the Five Year Freeze Steering Committee and is also a member of the AEBC and is concerned about who will cover the ethical, social and economic aspects of GM once the AEBC is disbanded. "If the Government fails to address these issues then it will be failing the public once again. What we need now is a commission with a wider remit for food and farming which includes GM and does not allow it to be forgotten. But it must have a wide membership that will challenge the Government." she told the Freeze.



## The Supporters of The Five Year Freeze are:

ACE Plumbing Ltd, 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, 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.

## ...news...

### Monsanto guilty of GM bribes

Monsanto has agreed to pay \$1.5 million to settle charges of breaking the US Foreign Corrupt Practices Act by bribing an official in the Indonesian Ministry of the Environment to repeal a requirement for an environmental impact study the company needed before it could cultivate GM crops. Monsanto paid the falsified invoices under a false entry in its books for 'consulting services'. The Indonesian official did not repeal the requirement for the study.

The charges also included at least \$700,000 of illegal or questionable payments made to at least 140 Indonesian government officials and their families.

### World Conservation Union (IUCN) calls for GM moratorium

In November in Bangkok the IUCN, the world's largest conservation organisation, called for a halt to the release of GMOs in to the environment.

The call is designed to guard against possible adverse affects on biological resources until it can be demonstrated there is no threat to biodiversity and human and animal health from GMOs.

Over the coming year the IUCN will also compile a report on the impact of GMOs on biodiversity and human health.

### Member States vote to keep national bans

At the end of November in a meeting of the EU regulatory committee on deliberate releases of GM, member states were asked by the European Commission to vote to end several nationally imposed bans on some GMOs. The bans were legitimately invoked by Austria, France, Germany, Greece and Luxembourg between 1997 and 2000 on some GM varieties of maize and oilseed rape, in view of the many scientific uncertainties about the impact of GM crops.

However, the European Food Safety Authority decided that the evidence provided by the countries for the bans and the uncertainties around GMOs did not justify the national bans and so, under pressure from the WTO GM case against them, the Commission is trying to force these countries to drop their bans and accept GM products they believe to be risky.

The vote failed to reach a qualified majority either way and so the decision will now pass to the Council of Ministers meeting later in the year. However, in one case the Commission narrowly escaped a qualified majority AGAINST its proposal. The Freeze and many of our supporters wrote to Margaret Beckett urging the UK to vote against lifting the bans and thousands wrote to their environment ministers across Europe to do the same. Despite this the UK was one of only 3 countries to vote in favour of overturning all the bans.