

# Thin Ice



the GM Freeze Campaign newsletter

Issue 1, Nov/Dec 2005

## New look Freeze

**W**elcome to Thin Ice, the GM Freeze newsletter. There have been some big changes at the Freeze over the summer and we have been working hard to ensure that the campaign will be around in the future for as long as needed to achieve our goals.

### What's been happening?

In July 2005 the Five Year Freeze campaign that many of you have supported since it began in 1999, was officially wound up and a new organisation, GM Freeze, was launched. The new campaign has the status of a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee, which will make it easier for us to raise funds. Any other organisation can become a member of GM Freeze and have the right to vote on decisions

at our Annual General Meeting, so we continue to be an alliance of UK organisations.

The change of name reflects the fact that over five years have now passed since the campaign started and many of our original questions remain unanswered. The immediate prospect of GM crops being planted in our fields may have receded, but the biotech companies and the U.S. Administration are still determined to force us to accept their GM products in our food.

One major change in the campaign is that we are now asking our supporters to pay an annual subscription fee, which will help us to cover the cost of producing newsletters, as well as providing us with a more stable income. Organisations who join become

### The GM Freeze campaign is calling on the Government for a Freeze on:

The growing of genetically modified plants and the production of genetically modified farm animals for any commercial purpose

Imports of genetically modified foods, plants, farm crops and farm animals, and produce from genetically modified plants and animals

The patenting of genetic resources for food and farm crops

members of the company and individuals who join will receive 6 newsletters a year, including simple actions you can take, as well as urgent action emails. We have produced a new recruitment leaflet that has a membership form attached and copies are available on request from the Freeze office.

**If you have not already done so then we very much hope that you will decide to join GM Freeze** as your support has been invaluable over the last 6 years, and we have achieved an enormous amount. We look forward to some exciting times with GM Freeze and to working with you in the future.

You can contact us during office hours by calling 020 7837 0642 or you can email [carrie@gmfreeze.org](mailto:carrie@gmfreeze.org). We also have a brand new website at [www.gmfreeze.org](http://www.gmfreeze.org)

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## Get active

### Ask your MP to sign Early Day Motion (EDM) 396

EDMs are effectively parliamentary petitions that prove support in Westminster for the issue they relate to. Asking your MP to sign a particular EDM is a simple and effective action you can take to raise their awareness of your concerns and for them to show their support publicly. You can find out who your MP is at: [www.locata.co.uk/commons/](http://www.locata.co.uk/commons/) or by calling 020 7219 4272.

To see if your MP has already signed go to: <http://edmi.parliament.uk/EDMi/EDMList.aspx>

The text of the EDM is: '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 decisions that deny

consumer choice for GM-free food and leave farmers without compensation for GM contamination; recognises the growing movement for GM-free areas across Europe from farmers, local authorities and communities; believes that local authorities should have the right to decide whether GM crops can be grown in their area; further notes that EU law makes the drawing up of rules to avoid GM contamination the responsibility of national parliaments; and further 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.'

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## GM food could be a you think

Carrie Stebbings looks at the big picture of how the situation with GM has shifted over the last two years, where the key decisions are being made, and why we must not let our guard down now.

When I joined the Freeze campaign in May 2003 the US had just launched its complaint against Europe's de facto moratorium on GM at the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the Government's GM Nation Public Debate was just about to begin, the results of the field scale evaluations were due and you couldn't open a national newspaper without seeing a headline about GM. That October we joined one thousand people and farmers marching and driving tractors down Whitehall to deliver petitions against GM to Downing Street, and hundreds of people had signed the Green Gloves pledge to pull up any GM crops that were planted in the UK.

In March 2004 the Government announced that, in line with the results of the field scale evaluations, it would not allow GM oil seed rape or sugar beet to be grown in the UK, but it would allow GM maize to be grown. Soon after that Bayer withdrew its application to place their GM maize variety, Chardon LL, on the national seed list. As no other application to place a GM maize seed on the market is far enough through the approvals process, this effectively means that no GM crop is likely to be ready for planting in the UK before 2008. This, along with continued rejection by food retailers of GM ingredients, has largely taken the spotlight off GM for the moment, and there is a general perception among the public that the issue has been resolved.

Unfortunately, the biotech companies did not pack up and go home, rather they have shifted their attention to other countries where there

is less opposition and fewer or no regulations on GM. We now face the possibility of GM getting into our food because of decisions being taken in developing countries, such as Brazil and China and by the European Commission in Brussels. There is increasing pressure on maintaining the integrity of a non-GM food chain, and most of the time we are not even aware about it.

These are the main areas of focus at the moment:

### Animal feed and the link to GM-free chocolate

The main market for GM in Europe continues to be animal feed, mainly soya meal, imported from the USA and Latin America. Most products from animals fed on GM feed are not labelled as such, so many people are unaware of what they buying.

Most of the soya grown in the USA and Argentina is now GM and non-GM soya has previously been provided from Brazil. However, Brazil recently passed a law allowing GM soya to be grown and some Brazilian farmers are being persuaded to try it. At present, the

financial incentives to grow GM-free soya are not there for the farmers because supermarkets and manufacturers have failed to place firm orders. Therefore it's likely that the supplies of non-GM soya will be under threat as GM soya expands, either because farmers switch to GM or because of contamination.

This in turn will mean that non-GM soya supplies for human food become scarce, e.g. derivatives such as lecithin, used in chocolate and biscuits and vegetable oil.

See our feature on animal feed on the back page for more information.

### World Trade Organisation (WTO) GM dispute

In May 2003 the US, Argentina and Canada launched their challenge against the EU at the WTO. They claimed that Europe was breaking trade rules by delaying decisions on GM approvals and by some countries banning certain GM products. All the evidence in the case has been heard and the first interim report is now expected in January 2006 at the

### GM crops authorized for use in Europe by October 2005\*

GM Crop Variety	Date authorised
Maize BT176 - tolerant to glufosinate ammonium & insect resistant	1997
Maize T25 - tolerant to glufosinate ammonium	1998
Maize Mon 810 - insect resistant	1998
Maize BT11 - tolerant to glufosinate ammonium	1998
Monsanto Soybeans - tolerant to glyphosate	1996
Maize NK603 - tolerant to glyphosate	2004
Maize Mon863 - resistant to corn rootworm	2003
Oil Seed Rape GT73 - tolerant to glyphosate	2005
Maize GA21 - tolerant to glyphosate	1998

\* Information taken from the EU Community Register of GM foods. The extent to which each crop is authorised is complicated and often in a state of change. Only BT11, BT176, T25 and Mon 810 maize are allowed to be cultivated in the EU.

## closer than

earliest. Closely linked to this is the apparent desire of the European Commission to demonstrate to the WTO that the EU approvals process is working well, by approving every GM application that comes before them (see below).

*the biotech companies did not pack up and go home, rather they have shifted their attention to other countries where there is less opposition and fewer or no regulations on GM*

### A Pro-GM European Commission

All GM products have to go through an approval process before they can be sold or grown in Europe. This process stalled for about 5 years while the regulations for labelling and traceability of GM products and the approvals process were strengthened. The process started again in 2003 with the first approval for import of a GM sweet corn.

However, there has been disagreement amongst European countries on each approval that has come up, and each time voting in the European Council of Ministers has failed to achieve the required majority either for or against. In these circumstances the final decision is taken by the pro-GM European Commission. In the last twelve months every GM application has been approved by the European Commission despite concerns raised by many member states at every stage of the regulatory process. Thus none of the approved GM varieties

command majority support amongst EU member states.

See the box opposite for details of which GM crops have been authorized for use in Europe.

### The Critical Co-existence Debate

The debate about whether GM and non-GM can both be grown without contamination of other non-GM crops occurring (known as co-existence) is raging on. The EU passed responsibility for making laws on co-existence to each member state to come up with their own. The UK started a public consultation on what the regulations might look like last summer, but the second phase of the consultation has been continually delayed and now may not happen until early in 2006.

### Conclusion

Having faced huge public opposition in Europe to their promotion of GM products, the biotech companies are turning to more subtle techniques that are not so blatantly in the public eye, and which would make GM contamination of our food chain inevitable, which amounts to GM by the back door.

There is a lot that we can do to stop this from happening, but we need continued public interest and involvement, as that's what makes change happen. That's why it's critical that you carry on participating in the debate about the future of our food, by writing to your MPs, writing to supermarkets and spreading the word that GM food is closer than most people think.

## Any Questions?

Let us know if there is a question about GM that you would like us to answer and we will do our best to respond in the next newsletter. It can be as simple as defining a term like 'co-existence', or more complicated if you prefer. Send your question to [carrie@gmfreeze.org](mailto:carrie@gmfreeze.org) or call 020 7837 0642.

## GM seed contamination lasts longer

A Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) survey of land surveyors, back in 1999, warned that growing GM crops could lower the value of farmland. New research published by the Royal Society in September suggests that RICS might have been correct.

The research reports on how long oilseed rape seeds, spilt at harvest, survive to germinate in following crops. Based on field data gathered during the BRIGHT trials, modelling of oilseed rape seed survival in the soil predicted that following non-GM crops on the same field could be contaminated to above 0.9% for up to 15 years. Land could be blighted with GM plants for even longer because the decay of spilt seed is very slow and the dormant seeds can germinate any time.

The new research undermines previous ideas about contamination arising from spilled seed at harvest. An average of 3575 seeds per square metre dropped off the crop on harvest (in some cases 10,000 seeds were lost) compared to the normal sowing rate of around 100 seeds per square metre. Burial of the seed during cultivations or by falling down cracks in the soil triggers dormancy which can last for years.

The research also undermines the UK government's coexistence plans based on the unacceptable GM threshold of 0.9%, because high levels of contamination could occur from within the field which would then be topped up by GM pollen blowing in from neighbouring fields. Farmers buying or renting land to grow non-GM oilseed would have to be very careful to find out about its GM history first!

How much more evidence does the government need before they ban GM oilseed rape?

### Terminator technology is back

We thought Terminator technology was yesterday's news. Terminator poses a serious and immediate threat to farmers, the environment and food sovereignty worldwide and yet new patents have just been granted for Terminator genes. More information in the next edition of *Thin Ice*.

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## Animal feed – the GM Trojan horse

The biggest market for GM products in Europe remains animal feed, mainly soya meal imported from the US and Latin America. Thousands of tonnes of GM animal feed are imported in to the UK every year and the chances are that the animal and dairy products you buy (unless they are organic) are from animals fed on GM feed. The law does not require these products to be labelled, which means that you can't choose to avoid them.

The majority of soya produced in North America and Argentina is now GM. European markets were relying on Brazil for GM-free soya as it was illegal to grow GM crops there. However, Brazil has recently authorised GM soya and some farmers are being tempted to grow it by promises of lower production costs. Most farmers will need a financial incentive if they are to continue to grow non-GM soya. Supermarkets have a key role to play. They need to specify to their suppliers that they will only want GM-free animal products, pay a small premium and guarantee to keep ordering GM-free in the future.

Currently there is enough GM-free soya available in Brazil to supply the entire European market. However, any increase in the planting of GM soya for animal feed would start to have an impact on the availability of non-GM soya derivatives in human food, such as lecithin in chocolate and biscuits, which are by-products of the animal feed industry. If this trend continued then it could mean an end to GM-free chocolate, amongst other things. Staff in the GM Freeze office certainly aren't prepared to see that happen!

GM Freeze and a coalition of NGOs, have hosted a series of meetings with supermarkets and producers at which discussions concentrated on removing all GM animal feed from their supply chains. We have asked them to place firm orders for GM-free soya animal feed to help ensure that supplies do

not diminish in the future. Worryingly, companies seem reluctant to do this.

Whilst the relatively small Marks & Spencer have done the most and removed GM animal feed from much of their fresh animal produce, including milk, meat, fish and eggs, most of the others have gone only partially down

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this route and the feedback from our meetings and other sources has been of concern. Indeed Tesco are now telling their customers that the reason they have not gone further in their non-GM policy is to help hard pressed farmers:

*'The farming community have also told us that to extend the range of meat we sell from animals fed on non-GM would put immense pressure on them'*. Tesco reply to customer letter, July 2005

GM-free animal feed costs UK farmers more to buy than GM because they are charged for keeping it separate

from GM during processing and import, and because there is an added cost for testing and certifying that it is GM-free. Of course, if there is a premium involved in buying GM-free animal feed it makes sense that the person in the supply chain making the biggest profits absorbs most of the increased costs. The choice is between supermarkets, consumers (that means us), farmers or commodity traders as such Cargill. Who do you think should absorb the premium of keeping our food GM-free?!

**What would it cost supermarkets to go GM-free?** Non-GM animal feed in the UK was only fetching around £5 per tonne premium last year. This is because soya and maize only make up a fraction of the daily feed of a dairy cow and other factors, such as labour, are far more significant in the total costs of production. In the case of liquid milk this would mean about 0.15 pence per litre price increase for cows fed a GM-free diet. Hard pressed dairy farmers may struggle to absorb such a cost but the highly profitable retail sector ought to be able to cope with it.

Last year Tesco sold 17% of the UK's liquid milk sales or 1.1 billion litres per year - 30% of supermarket sales\*. A 0.15 pence per litre increase would cost the company £1.65 million. Sounds a lot but in the great scheme of things it amounts to only 0.08% of the pre-tax profit announced this year by Tesco (£2,029 million). So by paying a small premium for non-GM milk, Tesco would protect farmers from further pressure, meet customer demands and the company could bask in the glory of a job well done. It won't escape the notice of farmers that the Chief Executive Officer of Tesco, Sir Terry Leahy, could cover the premium of non-GM milk out of his £3.19 million salary package he received last year and still leave plenty to spare!

\* Figures from the Milk Development Council and TNS

### Get active

If you want to stop the use of GM in animal feed, you can:

1. Write to your local supermarket to tell them that you do not want to buy products from animals fed on a GM diet and asking them to take positive action to remove GM animal feed from their supply chains. You can use the points from this article to help compose your letter.

2. Sign the Greenpeace GMOs in Animal Feed petition online at <http://www.greenpeace.org/gefeedpetition> or call the GM Freeze office on 020 7837 0642 for paper copies.