

Thin Ice



the GM Freeze Campaign newsletter

Issue 2, Jan/Feb 2006

It's time to ban Terminator for good

To most people, seeds represent the potential of life and growth and can be powerful symbols of food and agriculture, as well as reminders of our reliance on nature to provide for us. Since farming began people have saved seeds from one harvest to sow the following season, providing them with a level of food security and self-sufficiency. For some of the poorest people it is an economic necessity. Saving seeds also allows people to breed crop varieties particularly suited to their own field and weather conditions and more resistant to local pests. Local communities have often developed seed varieties over generations using their local knowledge and swapping seeds with each other to improve varieties.

In contrast, the development of GM crops is underpinned by the system of patenting. Companies search for and identify plant and animal genes that have useful traits, such as protection from cold temperatures or resistance to certain pests, or medicinal properties. They then patent these 'inventions' which means that anyone else has to pay to use them. Thanks to patent laws agricultural biotechnology companies can charge farmers a technolo-

gy fee to buy their GM varieties and they can prosecute anyone who grows the crops without paying the fee, as the genes inside the seeds are considered to

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belong to the company that patented them.

For agbiotech companies, farmers who save seeds present several problems. One is that they could buy GM seeds one year and save the seeds from the harvest to plant the following year, thus denying the corporations their technology fee. Even seed saving of non-GM crops represents lost markets for agbiotech and seed companies. They would make much more money if all farmers had to buy seed from them every year.

To address this problem and to protect their patents, companies invented Terminator Technology, officially known as V-GURTs or Varietal - Genetic Use Restriction Technologies. Through genetic modification companies produce seeds that are sterile and will

not germinate when sown, forcing farmers to buy their seeds each year and increasing corporate control over the global seed supply.

Terminator was first patented by the US Department of Agriculture and the Delta and Pine Land Company in 1998. The potential threat to small farmers and

to biodiversity caused global outrage and protests and in 2000 the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) recommended that there should be no field testing or commercialisation of Terminator Technology.

However, at a meeting of the scientific advisory to the CBD in Bangkok in February 2005 several governments, including Canada and New Zealand, lobbied to overturn the de facto moratorium - a move which was defeated.

On 5th October 2005 the first patent in Europe was granted to Delta and Pine Land and the US Department of Agriculture and a similar patent was granted in Canada on 11th October. Thus it is clear that the agbiotech corporations want to press ahead with the introduction of Terminator and they are putting pressure on governments to support them.

Pressure from pro-industry governments will be renewed at CBD meetings at the end of January 2006 in Spain and in March in Brazil.

Public pressure is now needed to ensure that the UK government acts to maintain the moratorium, rather than weakening it in any way.



"It's perfect, JB! Before it can point to us, it self-destructs!"

Get active

With this newsletter you will find a leaflet with detailed information about Terminator Technology and a draft letter that you can send to your MP asking them to sign Early Day Motion 1300. You can also send the same letter to Government Ministers asking them to support the moratorium at the upcoming meetings.

If you need more copies of this leaflet then please contact Carrie on 020 7837 0642 or carrie@gmfreeze.org

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GM Food and Crops – who's protecting us?

GM Freeze publishes a report this month showing that the UK is not adequately protected from unauthorised GMOs entering our food supply.

The report 'GM Food and Crops: Maintaining Consumer Choice' is the result of a nationwide survey carried out between February and August 2005 on the enforcement of the EU GMO (Traceability and Labelling) Regulations 2004. It examines how well equipped the UK authorities are for enforcing the regulations on traceability and labelling of GM ingredients in food and animal feed, and the conclusions give real cause for concern.

Public anxiety and demands for a clear choice on GM across the EU led to the introduction of EC Regulation 1830/2003 which requires GM ingredients to be labelled and traceable and came in to force in April 2004. Throughout the negotiations of the new regulations, the UK Government and the Food Standards Agency (FSA), while supporting labelling and traceability in principle, voted against measures that strengthened the regulations.

The European Parliament insisted that traceability and labelling regulations of GM in food and feed be in place for two reasons:

- To enable post release monitoring of the potential health and environmental effects of a GMO to take place as required by EU Directive 2001/18.
- To enable consumers to exercise choice as to whether or not to consume GM ingredients or products derived from GMOs.

The regulations are to be enforced through inspections and other control measures including sample checks and testing of imported products. The burden of enforcement falls on local authorities, in particular the Trading Standards Authorities and the Port Health Authorities, who have to cover the costs of testing products, monitoring the accuracy of traceability and labelling and imposing penalties for non-compliance by

food manufacturers, retailers and importers.

The FSA defined offences under the regulations as:

- The sale and use of unauthorised products, particularly food.
- Failure to comply with requirements for authorised products.
- Failure to keep proper records.

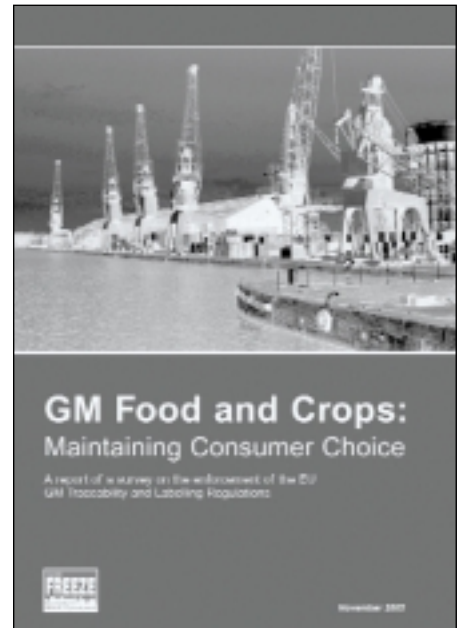
The GM Freeze survey concludes that the present enforcement procedures fall well short of offering guarantees that unauthorised GM varieties, including pharmaceutical crops, are not entering the UK food chain and that GM labelling on food and feed is accurate.

The report uses the recent example of the discovery that an unapproved and potentially harmful variety of GM maize (Bt10) was illegally imported in to Europe over 4 years without being detected. The report concludes with a twelve point action plan for improving levels of enforcement that would provide consumers and farmers with a reliable system of labelling to enable them to avoid GM food with confidence.

It has been sent to the Food Standards Agency and to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee and the Environmental Audit Committee in Parliament, as well as to Government Ministers and MPs in England and the devolved authorities asking them to take action to address the recommendations. We have also tabled an Early Day Motion (EDM) in Parliament that calls on the FSA and the Government to recognise the importance of enforcement at local level and ensure that Port Health Authorities monitor every incoming cargo which may contain GM and take a positive lead in enforcement by providing clear guidance and advice.

The main recommendations of the report are:

- That the main focus of enforcement should be at ports where potential GM cargoes enter the UK.
- That Port Health Authorities should be solely responsibility for enforcement



of the regulations and receive adequate funding to do this job.

- Random samples of food and feed sold to consumers and farmers should continue to ensure that segregation of GM and non-GM food in the UK is up to scratch.
- The FSA must provide much better guidance to local authorities on sampling procedures to ensure that no unauthorised GM traits enter the food chain and labelling is accurate.
- Cargoes containing unapproved GM traits should be returned to the country of origin.

You can download the report at www.gmfreeze.org or call Carrie on 020 7837 0642 for a paper copy.

Get active

If you are concerned about the findings of our report, ask your MP to sign EDM 1488 (Enforcement of the GMO traceability and labelling regulations) to register their support for full enforcement of the regulations. You can find out who your MP is at: 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/>

GM-Free regions spread across Europe

The resistance to GM food in Europe is greater than ever. The number of European regions and provinces now declaring themselves GM-free zones, or publicly wishing to restrict GM crops, has climbed to 172 in the EU alone. Over 4500 local governments and smaller areas in Europe are similarly calling for restrictions to commercial growing. There are GM-free initiatives virtually in every European country.

Find a full list of GMO-free regions and areas in the EU at: www.gmofree-europe.org

New Report

Who Benefits from GM Crops? Monsanto and the corporate-driven genetically modified crop revolution. Published by Friends of the Earth International. Available online at www.foei.org

Delays delays

WTO Case Ruling

The long-awaited and often delayed ruling on the American-led World Trade Organisation complaint against Europe's de facto moratorium on GM approvals was due on 5th January and has now been postponed until February after being delayed for about 18 months...

DEFRA Co-existence consultation

The long-awaited and often delayed DEFRA public consultation on the co-existence of GM and non-GM crops is now expected sometime in February after being delayed for about 18 months...

We hope to be able to give you information on how to get involved in the consultation in the March newsletter.

GM peas highlight gaps in EU safety testing

A recent study from Australia¹ has raised serious questions about the safety of GM foods currently on the market in Europe. The ten year research programme creating a genetically modified pea was halted after mice exposed to the pea developed an immune response, with allergic-type reactions.

The GM pea contained a protein naturally found in beans which protects them from pea weevils, and had not previously been associated with allergic reactions. But when the gene producing the protein was transferred to peas using genetic modification, subtle changes were seen in the protein produced, and mice exposed to the pea suffered swelling and asthmatic-type reactions.

The research also found that when the mice were fed a common food allergen (egg white protein) at the same time as the GM peas, they developed an immune response to the egg white protein too,

indicating that the new protein was priming the mice to react to other foods.

These results are very alarming, because current requirements for allergenicity testing for GM foods in the EU would simply not detect these effects. Scientists and the GM industry assume that proteins produced in GM plants behave identically to the naturally produced protein, but none of the currently approved GM foods have been sufficiently tested to prove that this is the case.²

Liz Wright, Friends of the Earth.

1 Prescott VE, Campbell PM, Moore A, Mattes J, Rothenberg ME, Foster PS, Higgins TJV and Hogan SP (2005). Transgenic expression of bean alpha-amylase inhibitor in peas results in altered structure and immunogenicity. *Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry* 53:9023-30

2 Forthcoming Friends of the Earth briefing

GM in organic - a blueprint for contamination

The European Commission wants to impose a GM threshold of 0.9% contamination on organic products as part of a review of the Organic Regulations. Products with less than 0.9% GM content would still be classed as organic. Above it they would have to be labelled as GM just like products grown intensively.

The Commission's proposals stem from their Recommendations to Member States on legislating for coexistence of GM and non-GM crops issued in 2003.

Commission officials are claiming the 0.9% threshold introduced for non-GM labelling and traceability regime in 2003 actually already applies to organic products. They argue that this is so because member states have failed to agree a GM threshold under the 1991 Organic Regulation.

Safeguarding and enforcing organic standards across Europe is not controlled by the EC but by individual certifiers, such as the Soil Association. The Organic Regulation prohibits the use of GMOs. Organic certifiers have thus decided to operate the lowest possible GM threshold

in organic products which is not detectable at 0.1%. They intend to keep to this threshold whatever the EC impose.

Consumers have come to expect organic food to be free of GM contamination but, once again on GM issues, the EC has chosen to ignore the views of the EU electorate.

The Commission plans to impose the higher threshold on all farmers to make "coexistence" possible. Without it, GM crop cultivation would become impractical and impossible. The biotech companies are depending on it to open the door to GM cultivation in the EU.

A UK legal opinion from Paul Lasok QC concluded "*If co-existence measures were to operate to a "baseline norm" (such as the 0.9% labelling thresholds) there is a very real risk that the "organic" label could become defunct.*"

The attempt to impose an unacceptable threshold on organic products will focus debate on how the EC intends to impose its GM contamination blueprint in 2006.

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The right to full information and labelling

One hundred and thirty countries have now ratified the UN's Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, paving the way for an almost global acceptance of rules to protect countries from the unregulated import of Living Modified Organisms (LMOs) or GMOs.

The next Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol takes place in Curitiba, Brazil in March and the issue of an international system for identification and labelling of imported LMOs is on the agenda for agreement. However, the Meeting of the Parties in May 2005 failed to agree unanimously on the identification details that should accompany imports, with Brazil and New Zealand blocking progress, meaning that effective implementation of the Protocol is virtually impossible. Pro-GM governments have proposed that cargoes should be labelled "may contain GMOs" - which has previously been rejected by the EU in favour of tighter and more specific wording.

Some developing countries demand full identification of LMOs so that imports

are clearly labelled with which LMOs are present and so that only those approved in the country of import are allowed in. This is a demand too far for the GM industry who warn that it would lead to extra food production costs and even argue that processors would move production abroad to countries where regulation is not as strict, thus causing unemployment in developing countries.

The prospects of all countries agreeing to a proposal on comprehensive identification and labelling hangs very much in the balance. Key to the negotiations is Europe and whether they

will work alongside developing countries and demand real labelling of imports or accept a weak decision. It is essential that Europe stands firm and ensures that developing countries have the same right to know what is in their food as Europeans do. Lobbying of UK ministers will help head off moves to adopt meaningless "may contain" labelling, which would stink of double standards and leave many of the world's population as second class consumers.

Adrian Bebb, Friends of the Earth Europe.

Swiss citizens ban GM crops

In a November referendum over 55% of Swiss voters said no to GMOs and supported a five year moratorium on GM farming. The vote is consistent with public opinion surveys which consistently show consumers worldwide are wary of GMOs. The ban is embarrassing for biotech company

Syngenta which has its international headquarters in Basel, Switzerland and states its vision as being 'to deliver better food for a better world through outstanding crop solutions'.

Perhaps they need to do some market research in to what people actually want to eat...

Romania: GM out of Control

In a report released in January, Greenpeace International has outlined the extent of GM contamination of soya crops in Romania. The report, 'Genetically Engineered Soybean Cultivation in Romania: Out of control', highlights the negative impacts of Romania's weak and poorly enforced regulatory system as well as the influence of biotech corporations who have lobbied for weak safety regulations but strong controls to stop farmers saving seeds.

Romania currently allows the planting of Monsanto's Roundup Ready GM soya, which is not approved for cultivation in Europe. Its regulations are weak and not compatible with the relatively strict labelling and traceability regulations in Europe, which will cause problems as Romania hopes to join the European Union in January 2007.

According to farmers' associations and the ex-country manager of Monsanto in Romania GM soya accounts for up to 90% of soya grown and yet nobody has control

over the situation. There are no inspectors, no laboratories for testing and a black market has developed for GM saved seeds which are not declared to the authorities.

This means that Romanian soya products might be banned within Europe after accession in order to prevent contamination of the European food supply. Greenpeace is calling for GM soya cultivation in Romania to be halted immediately to prevent further contamination while steps are taken to bring the situation under control.

The problems of the uncontrolled spread of GM through Romanian soya crops should act as a warning to the UK Government when they draft the new regulations on GM co-existence here. Let's hope they are ready to learn and to stand up to corporate lobbying in favour of protecting our food, crops and countryside.

The report is available from www.greenpeace.org/international/press/reports/GE-Romania

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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