

Thin Ice

GM Freeze Campaign newsletter / Issue 4, July/August 2006

Research highlights GM cotton failures

Researchers at Cornell University in the USA presented findings of a study of the performance of GM Bt cotton in China to a US agricultural economics conference last month. The data shows a variety of negative impacts, including increased pesticide use and lower incomes. These findings further undermine the claims of the biotech industry on the benefits of growing GM. More details may emerge when the results are published.

According to Michael Green of the Soil Association, the key findings of the report include:

- Bt farmers experienced a 438% increase in pesticide use between 2001 and 2004 to kill secondary pests. In 2004, Bt farmers spent 180% more on pesticides to control secondary pests (\$16.01) than non-Bt farmers (\$5.7).
- "Before the commercialisation of Bt cotton, the Chinese farmers applied an average of 20 pesticide treatments in a season to control

bollworm infestations." The average number of treatments fell to 6.6 in the early stage of Bt adoption, but this rose to 18.22 by 2004 - a 176% increase.

- Initially, Bt cotton farmers reduced pesticide use by 71% in 1999, and 55% in 2000 and 2001. However these savings on controlling primary pests (bollworms) were offset by the outbreak of secondary pests.
- By 2004, seven years after Bt commercialisation, Bt and non-Bt farmers both spent the same on pesticides, around \$101/ha on pesticides. However, Bt farmers received 8% less net income than conventional farmers since Bt seed is triple the cost of conventional seed

Shenghui Wang, David R. Just and Per Pinstrup-Andersen (2006) *Tarnishing Silver Bullets: Bt Technology Adoption, Bounded Rationality and the Outbreak of Secondary Pest Infestations in China*, www.nature.com/news/2006/060724/full/060724-5.html

Limited edition T-shirts for sale

The Mill House Centre Ltd in Bewdley has kindly donated a limited number of t-shirts with an original, colourful design and a clear message on GM food - 'Say NO to GM food and crops'

The t-shirts are white and made from 100% cotton with the design on the front. They are available in the following sizes at a cost of £7.00 each, including postage and packing:

To fit chest:
Small 32"/34"
Medium 36"/38"
Large 38"/40"
Extra Large 40"/42"

We'll be selling them on a first come, first served basis, so place your orders as soon as possible! All funds received will help us to continue the GM Freeze campaign.



Europeans still oppose GM Food

A recent Eurobarometer survey of public attitudes shows that although Europeans are relatively supportive of the use of medical and industrial biotechnology, 58% oppose GM food.

The survey states 'GM food is widely seen as not being useful, as morally unacceptable and as a risk for society.' See www.ec.europa.eu/research/press/2006/pdf/

French authorise secret GM pharma trials

The French Government has been condemned for licensing two sites for crops genetically engineered to produce pharmaceuticals ahead of legislation to deal with crop contamination and liability.

Two out of 17 new GM test sites announced by the French Minister of agriculture, Mr Dominique Bussereau, include maize and tobacco genetically engineered to produce pharmaceuticals.

Pharmaceutical crops or "pharming" are second generation GM crops designed to produce drugs, vaccines and other medical products. They have already been grown experimentally in the USA where problems of contamination have already occurred.

Locations of GM test sites in France are kept secret meaning that neighbouring farmers are unable to take action to prevent the risk of contamination by GM pollen fertilizing their plants. France exports a variety of maize products to the UK including seed and grain for animal feed.

GM Freeze, 94 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF
Tel: 020 7837 0642
Fax: 020 7837 1141
Email: enquiry@gmfreeze.org
Web: www.gmfreeze.org

Thin Ice



the GM Freeze Campaign newsletter

Issue 4, July/August 2006

GM consultation published

We have been waiting two years for DEFRA (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) to publish its public consultation on GM coexistence measures. The continued delays highlight the complexity and sensitivity of the issue within Government. However, on 20th July we finally got sight of the consultation and some of our worst fears have been confirmed.

The Government intends to put systems in place that allow routine GM contamination of both organic and non-organic food up to a threshold of 0.9% that it says would not have to be labelled as containing GM material.

The Government and the biotech industry have assumed a 'right to contaminate' food with GM material

that we believe has to be fundamentally rejected. We should have the right to choose food that is completely GM-free and this would be impossible under the current proposals. There are also big questions about who should be liable for the economic losses farmers will face when their crops are contaminated with GM and they can no longer sell them into the non-GM market.

We need as many people as possible to respond to the consultation and tell the Government what you want them to do. Inside this newsletter you will find information on the options the Government has put forward and details of how you can respond to the consultation.

The deadline for responses is 20th October.



Farmers making their point at the Tractors and Trolleys demonstration in central London.

NFU adopts pro-GM policy

On 20th June the National Farmers' Union (NFU) Council adopted a new policy on GM coexistence. The draft policy was leaked to NGOs before the Council meeting and was met with an open letter of criticism from the Soil Association.

NFU Vice President Paul Temple responded to accusations that the new policy is pro-GM in a letter to *Farmers Weekly* where he wrote: *'The NFU is not in any way promoting GM technology and we see it as vital that farmers do not lose their ability to choose and maintain crop integrity'*.

The policy is notable in that it does not mention a single possible negative impact on farmers or the environment of growing GM crops, let alone the fact that consumers do not want to buy GM products. In fact it makes the point that the NFU recognizes potential

benefits to its members, the environment and consumers from GM food.

It also states that no system of farming should be compromised or disadvantaged by another and that it is important to achieve 'real choice' for farmers, growers and consumers. However, incorporated in the NFU definition of 'real choice' is the assumption that a level of GM contamination is inevitable and accepted, and that 'real choice' begins above that level.

What is Paul Temple up to?

At the recent co-existence conference in Vienna (see inside for more detail), a participant made a point from the floor. He introduced himself as a GM farmer in Spain who was appalled that no GM farmers had been invited to talk about the many benefits of GM.

He turned out to be NFU Vice President Paul Temple, who was listed in the conference programme as representing the biotech lobbying group Agricultural Biotechnology in Europe.

Mr Temple has since told us that he does not farm in Spain - so what was he up to at the conference? He obviously had no qualms about speaking out in favour of GM in front of NFU colleagues and biotech representatives, while not being entirely clear about who he was representing.

He went on to have dinner with Simon Barber of biotech industry lobby group EuropaBio and Graeme Brooks from PG Economics, which has produced reports for the biotech industry on how GM coexistence is possible.

Co-existence

what's all the fuss about?

What is co-existence?

According to the European Commission (EC), 'Co-existence refers to the ability of farmers to make a practical choice between conventional, organic and GM crop production, in compliance with the legal obligations for labelling and/or purity criteria. None of these types of agriculture should be excluded in the EU.

The possibility of adventitious presence of GM crops in non-GM crops cannot be dismissed, and may have commercial implications for the farmers whose crops are affected. Consequently, suitable measures during cultivation, harvest, transport, storage, and processing may be necessary to ensure co-existence. Co-existence thus concerns only the economic implications of GMO admixture, the measures to achieve sufficient segregation between GM and non-GM production and the costs of such measures'.

While those who are against GM crops want strict measures to prevent any GM contamination, those promoting GM would prefer that it becomes integrated in to the food chain and want weak regulations that make it as easy to grow as possible.

Is co-existence possible?

Evidence from all around the world shows that if GM crops are grown then cross contamination of non-GM crops is inevitable. The dilemma is that in order to make way for GM crops, a level of contamination in non-GM, including organic crops has to be set. To protect non-GM crops from contamination would take measures so strict that it would make growing GM crops impractical for the majority of farmers.

The Freeze argues that co-existence is not possible, because contamination takes place. The EU and DEFRA argue that to

facilitate coexistence we have no choice but to accept a level of contamination because we have to make space for GM crops.

Why 0.9%?

The EU Regulation 1829/2003 that deals with GM labelling states in Section 2, Article 12, paragraph 2 that products containing over 0.9% of GM material must be labelled as containing GM.

Products containing GM material under 0.9% do not have to be labelled, providing that this presence is adventitious or technically unavoidable. To avoid being labelled as GM the

producer must supply evidence to show they have taken appropriate steps to avoid the GM presence.

Background to the consultation

When the Government made its policy announcement on GM crops in March 2004, they said that they would not allow GM crops to be cultivated in the UK before rules on co-existence had been put in place. The EC has handed responsibility for co-existence rules to individual member states to come up with their own, as long as they fall within an EC

Recommendation on what would be acceptable.

On 20th July 2006 the Government finally published a public Consultation on proposals for managing the coexistence of GM, conventional and organic crops. Anyone can respond to the consultation and the deadline is 20th October 2006.

What is the Government proposing?

Although the Government is asking the public to take part in the consultation, there are certain decisions that they have already made. They argue that these

decisions fall within current EU regulations and so alternatives are not possible. We believe there are fundamental flaws in the consultation that need to be addressed. In fact, the proposals in the consultation would mark the end of any real choice between GM and non-GM food.

Some of the main proposals include:

- The Government has decided to put measures in place that would allow for routine contamination of up to 0.9% GM material, which it says would not have to be labelled, including in organic food. We believe that this is in direct

contravention of the labelling laws as in order to avoid labelling producers must prove that the contamination was accidental or technically unavoidable. If the rules are designed to facilitate the contamination, then it cannot be accidental or technically unavoidable. There should be an option in the consultation for measures that aim for the lowest possible level of contamination.

- The proposed separation distances between crops are inadequate and will result in routine contamination e.g. 35 metres for oilseed rape.
- The proposals for liability are weak and do not adequately protect non-GM farmers.
- The Government questions whether a public GM register is necessary, meaning that the public would not know where GM crops were being grown.

'Freedom of choice' is a myth

In April Freeze co-ordinator Carrie Stebbings attended a European Commission (EC) conference on GM Coexistence. Here she reports on the battle to define 'freedom of choice'.

Under their presidency of the EU, the anti-GM Austrian Government hosted a Europe-wide conference on the coexistence of GM, conventional and organic crops, optimistically and ambiguously titled 'Freedom of Choice' and sponsored by the European Commission.

Keynote speakers included European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, Mariann Fischer Boel and European Commissioner for Environment, Stavros Dimas.

It soon became clear that there is fundamental disagreement on what the terms coexistence and freedom of choice mean to different camps.

The position of the European Commission is that no form of agriculture should be excluded from Europe, and that includes GM. If GM

crops are grown, a certain level of contamination of non-GM crops will occur, and no one denies this. If measures to prevent all contamination from occurring (such as very wide separation distances between GM and non-GM fields) were taken, it would become impractical to grow GM. According to the EC that would be equal to excluding it from EU agriculture, and therefore not allowed.

Thus the EC is saying that GM crops cannot be excluded from agriculture. Hence every other type of farming has to make room for it by accepting a certain threshold of contamination of non-GM and organic crops. In the eyes of the EC and the biotech industry, this will allow real 'freedom of choice'.

GM Freeze sees the situation rather differently: Allowing GM contamination would effectively remove our freedom to choose genuinely non-GM products, so strict controls and prohibitions on GM cultivation will be needed. Again, for

the EC/ biotech industry this would remove their freedom of choice.

For the European Commission and the biotech industry, the word 'co-existence' inherently means allowing GM to grow along with other forms of agriculture and finding ways to make that possible. This assumes that GM contamination is acceptable to farmers and consumers.

We believe that, given the huge public opposition to GM and the uncertainties that still surround it, the debate on 'co-existence' should include the option that coexistence is not possible as it leads to unwanted GM contamination of non-GM crops and therefore there is no room for GM agriculture in Europe.

It was also clear from the presentations that politicians are still divided on the GM issue. While Mariann Fischer Boel said that GM farming has arrived and we need to develop the administrative tools to deal with it, Stavros Dimas argued that we

should be looking at alternatives to GM farming.

It was disappointing, although perhaps not surprising that some European politicians are still arguing that the problems with GM technology are about overcoming public concerns and winning them round to accepting GM through better communication. Perhaps they would do better to listen to what the public want and develop policies on those lines instead.

It seemed clear that the biotech industry have been lobbying heavily behind the scenes, as some politicians were saying that GM technology is coming whether we want it or not. It left me wondering who is really making the decisions, and since when did we as citizens lose the right to say what we want in our food and how we want it to be produced?

The coexistence consultation gives us the opportunity to tell the politicians that we still have the right to choose and that we want to protect our right not to eat ANY GM food.

Get active

The closing date for the consultation is Friday 20th October 2006. We need as many people as possible to take part and send the Government their views. With Friends of the Earth we have produced a guide to help you to respond to the consultation (a copy should be enclosed with this newsletter). If you do not have a copy then please contact us and we will send you one.

You can also download the guide from www.stopgmcontamination.org where there is more information, an easy email action and links to further activities you can take part in.

The full DEFRA consultation document is available online at www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/gmnongm-coexist/index.htm