

Thin Ice



the GM Freeze Campaign newsletter

Issue 6, December 06/January 07

GM with your chips

Over the last year or so there has been a growing concern within the Freeze that the availability of non-GM ingredients for food would be undermined by the expansion of GM soya in Brazil.

Recent reports from members and supporters from around the country indicate that this may well be the case. The ingredients causing greatest concern are those derived from soya such as vegetable oil and lecithin. These are the by-products of the production of soya meal which is used for animal feed.

The Freeze has received reports of sightings in supermarkets (including Tesco and the Co-op) of GM soya oil under the Pride label. In addition, 25 litre containers of soya oil labelled GM have been spotted at catering establishments.

Selling GM oil derived from Round-Up Ready soya is not illegal provided the packaging is labelled correctly. However, retailers who do sell such products are supporting the unsustainable production of GM soya in the Americas. In Brazil and Argentina, soya cultivation is eating into globally important habitats and

creating chemical dependent monocultures. In the USA, there are clear signs that Round-Up resistance in weed species is growing suggesting that this particular GM technology may be a nine day wonder.

GM Freeze has just received confirmation from the Food Standards Agency (FSA) that mass catering establishments need to label their wares if GM oil or other ingredients have been used in the preparation.

This means, for example, that fish and chips fried in GM oil need to be labelled as such.

This confirmation by the FSA backs up a policy which has been in place in the UK since the late 1990s – a rare example of the UK adopting a more rigorous stance than the rest of the EU on GM!

The law, of course, needs to be tested in the courts but, at present, if your chip shop, staff canteen or restaurant is using GM oil and not telling you either on the menu or at the service counter then they are acting illegally.



Pride GM Vegetable Oil on sale in a Co-op near you? Photo by Peter Brenton.

If there is no information, don't be afraid to ask where their cooking oil comes from and ask them to stop using GM and switch to non-GM alternatives. If they refuse to answer, the correct course of action would be to ask your local Trading Standards department to investigate. If they are labelling tell them you are taking your business elsewhere.

For an in depth briefing on GM labelling including in mass catering see the Freeze's web site www.gmfreeze.org

Farmer withdraws from potato trials

The Derbyshire site for the GM potato trials, planned to start in the spring, has been withdrawn because the landowner feared being the target for protests.

The second location in Cambridgeshire remains and the applicant, BASF Plant Sciences, say they will announce a replacement site very soon.

This could be located anywhere in the UK.

The story of how the Derbyshire farmer came to pull out is surrounded by confusion. On 14th December BBC Online reported that the farmer due to

host the Derbyshire trial had decided to withdraw as he feared protests by environmental campaigners.

Later *The Guardian* reported that it was believed that the farmer had received anonymous phone calls about his involvement in the trials. A biotech industry spokesman, condemned the use of intimidation, and even DEFRA joined in with condemnation of the threats.

However, further investigation revealed that some of the journalists covering the story did not even know who the farmer was, had not spoken to

him, and did not know the exact nature of the threats made.

On 22nd December *Farmer's Weekly* went on to report that 'A spokesman for Derbyshire Police said the force was aware that the intense publicity surrounding the GM trial had made the farmer concerned about his family's safety. Although, the spokesman said, it was understood that no specific threat had been made to the farmer'.

The *Farmer's Guardian* reported that Derbyshire Police had had no specific complaints about any threat, but that the

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The polluter should pay

Environmental liability has been on the EU's agenda since the 1980s. Long enough to make sure that the legislation is pretty much perfect and ensures that the polluter does pay, you might think.

Think again!

On 1st December Defra and the National Assembly of Wales published a consultation on how England and Wales (Scotland is consulting separately) will enact the EU Environmental Liability Directive. This Directive is supposed to make companies carrying out activities which might harm the environment liable for any harm they might cause. Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) are covered by the legislation.

However, industry lobbying succeeded in making sure the EU Directive was watered down to such an extent that biotechnology companies will effectively be let off the hook and not be strictly liable for the harm caused by GMOs. The Regulations in the UK can, however, be strengthened to make them more effective at safeguarding wildlife and the environment and ensuring that liability lies where it should.

However, there are many weaknesses that need to be addressed. Under the current proposals:

- farmers growing GM crops would be liable not the biotech companies.
- most farm land is not covered.
- ponds streams and small waterways are not covered.
- the majority of Sites of Special Scientific Interest are not covered.
- many farmland wildlife species are not covered including some very vulnerable species such as tree sparrows, corn bunting, water voles and brown hares.
- harm to the soil itself is excluded.
- liability is limited to 30 years after the harmful event took place.

- companies who have a GMO marketing consent would be exempt

The only chink of light is that Wales has proposed not to adopt the permit defence for GMOs so the law on environmental liability will apply even when the GM crop has a marketing consent or license for testing. Scotland has not so far followed the Welsh lead but may still do so if sufficient people respond.

Agricultural land is not covered at all and even some of the 'at risk' farmland birds, such as the corn bunting, linnet and tree sparrow, will not be given any protection despite the clear findings of the GM Field Scale Evaluations that

GM herbicide tolerant rape and beet would further reduce the food supply of these species. The Environmental Liability Regulations which will follow the consultation will be in place a long time. It is therefore vital that they are as strong as possible and represent the unique threat posed by GMOs, for instance, the creation of a new self replicating invasive weed threatening nature reserves or the impact of GM toxins on non target species.

Get active

Please take part in the consultation and demand that GMOs be made a special case because of their unique ability to reproduce and uncertainty about their long term impact. Insist that all farmland habitats and species are covered by the legislation, including the most important resource of all – the soil.

GeneWatch UK has prepared an excellent briefing on grounds for objections and how to take part at [www.genewatch.org/sub.shtml?als\[cid\]=546897](http://www.genewatch.org/sub.shtml?als[cid]=546897)

The deadline for comments for England, Wales and Northern Ireland is 16th February 2007. You can contact Defra directly via Friends of the Earth's email action. Go to: www.foe.co.uk/campaigns/biodiversity/ and click on Press for Change on the right hand menu.

The Scottish deadline is 23rd March 2007. Responses should be sent to eld.consultation@scotland.gsi.gov.uk. Or by post to:

International Environmental Issues Team, Environmental Futures, Environment Group, Scottish Executive, Victoria Quay, EDINBURGH EH6 6QQ.

There are also two Early Day Motions (EDMs) that you can ask your MP to sign. They are EDM 692 – Environmental Liability Directive and Genetically Modified Organisms and EDM 693 – Environmental Liability Directive and English Wildlife.

You can see the full text of the EDMs at <http://edmi.parliament.uk/EDMi/EDMList.aspx> and you can see if your MP has already signed the EDMs at <http://edmi.parliament.uk/EDMi/MemberList.aspx>

You can find out who your MP is at www.locata.co.uk/commons/ or by calling 020 7219 4272.

Terminator – government policy clarified

The benefits of letter writing have never been better illustrated than by a reply from the Environment Secretary sent to an MP in response to a Freeze supporter's letter on 'Terminator technology'.

In the run up to and after the Conference of Parties of the Convention (COP) on Biodiversity (CBD) in Brazil last March there seemed to be a shift in Government policy away from that adopted when the global moratorium on Terminator technology was first agreed in 2000. Former Environment Minister Michael Meacher made it clear that at the 2000 COP in Nairobi, the UK supported the global moratorium on Terminator technology until vital studies into the social and economic impacts of GM induced seed sterility had been completed and evaluated.

This policy recognised the importance of farm-saved seed for food security and the maintenance of biodiversity. The widespread use of Terminator technology would erode farmers' rights and reduce future options.

In his latest letter, sent on 5th December, David Miliband reiterates Defra's 2005 position which supported the "case by case" approach to approving Terminator crops or similar Genetic Use Restriction Technologies. He says "The issue of farmers saving seeds from their harvest to grow the following year is clearly a consideration, for some countries more than others. But so is the potential benefit of having a means to significantly reduce the spread of novel genes".

It appears that Mr Miliband has bought the biotech industry arguments that the spread of GM genes through normal cross pollination can be prevented by Terminator and similar technologies and that farm saved seed in countries, like the UK, is not significant.

Neither assertion stands up to close scrutiny. The idea that Terminator is anywhere close to achieving bio-containment was discredited in an advice note for Defra by the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment:

"The report concludes that none of the methodologies currently available guarantee transgene containment".

Similarly David Miliband's inference that farm saved seed is not important in some countries cannot be backed up with any evidence. Even in the UK, one of the founders of intensive agriculture, farm saved seed is still an important part of arable farming. Forty to fifty percent of farmers save oilseed rape seed each year in the UK. According to a recent consultation paper from Defra on reforms to seed laws, the practice is growing:

"Royalty income on farm saved seed now makes up around 20-25% of royalties for agriculture/horticulture breeders. Royalty collection has been associated with sales of certified seed and the UK has traditionally had high usage of certified seed. This has changed in recent years and the use of certified seed is now much lower."

So it appears that, not for the first time, a Government Minister has issued statements where their briefing was not strictly accurate and up to date. Sometimes it takes a well crafted letter to flush out these inconsistencies.

Farmer withdraws from potato trials

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farmer feared he may receive some if he went ahead with the trials.

GM Freeze has not spoken to the farmer nor knows who he is. We support a reasoned debate on whether these trials should go ahead given that the problem of potato blight is being tackled using conventional plant breeding and the potato industry has requested that they should not go ahead. GM Freeze does not believe intimidation should play any part in campaigning. We also believe that reporting should be based on facts not hearsay.

In contrast the Chief Executive of BASF, Hans Kast, takes a more black and white approach:

"If countries do not want to grow GM, then they should not be in the EU. They should get out of the EU and say we want to be on our own."

Dr Sue Mayer leaves GeneWatch UK

At the end of January, after 16 years of campaigning on GM issues, Sue Mayer has stepped down as Executive Director of GeneWatch UK to work as a vet in Derbyshire.

Sue has achieved a huge amount in the GM campaign over the years and we are sure you will join us in thanking her for everything she has done, particularly in her support of the Freeze since its beginning in 1999.

Petition against pharma-crops

The Union of Concerned Scientists in the USA has launched an online petition against pharmaceutical and industrial crops in food plants. You can sign at:

www.ucsus.org/food_and_environment/genetic_engineering/protect-our-food.html

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

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One planet farming?

'One planet farming' is a phrase that you may hear a lot more of in coming times. It was first coined by Environment Secretary David Miliband at last year's Royal Agricultural Show where he defined it as an approach to farming and food production that *"minimises the impact on the environment of patterns of food production and consumption, and farming which maximises its contribution to renewal of the natural environment"*.

This all seems extremely sound and if practiced should move farming away from the intensive production systems which have been so damaging to health and the environment in recent decades.

However, earlier this year Mr Miliband said that people who brought organic food were *"making a lifestyle choice"* adding that there were no benefits from organic food. Later he had to correct this by pointing out that there was very good evidence that biodiversity benefited greatly from organic farming methods.

All this, allied to DFID's overt support for intensifying farming in Africa rightly leaves you wondering what 'one planet farming' really means to the Government.

The Freeze has been concerned for some time that there will be a concerted attempt to re-brand GM crops as fitting into sustainable farming of the future. Last year we decided to open up a dialogue with farmers, food producers and others involved in the rural economy to find out what sustainable farming means to them. We organised three workshops in Wales, Scotland and the Midlands and we specifically invited people who don't normally have the time to go to 'stakeholder forums'. In all, 27 people responded whose backgrounds ranged from upland sheep farmer to café owner to school dinner cook to a retailer of farm supplies. This mixture of people stimulated three very interesting discussions and the outcomes are summarised in a short pamphlet published by the Freeze this month.

There were many common themes and recommendations which emerged from the three workshops. The area of greatest consensus was the need for a far greater understanding of farming and the food chain and the role it plays in managing the countryside and natural resources. Participants were very clear that consumers, farmers and politicians all needed to achieve a far better understanding of how, where and why food is produced the way it is. There was also real concern about the distance food was travelling to reach consumers and the role local production had in reducing food miles and boosting the local economy.

People were very clear that food production was also a very important part of life which should not be marginalised and we should avoid becoming dependent on importing food we could easily grow ourselves. One participant said we *"should be bold and revolutionary"* in our solutions. Although people see the need for innovation and new technology, the overriding message



The Future of Food and Farming

A Report Summarising Three Workshops for Smaller Businesses on a Sustainable Food Chain



February 2007

was that solutions need to rely heavily on social and economic reforms.

The message to politicians, like David Miliband, was to get out more and listen before setting policies. People were looking for consistent policies across the political spectrum.

A copy of the report is enclosed with this newsletter. If you would like further copies please send an A4 SAE to the Freeze with a 37p stamp.

West Africa GM cotton contamination

On 5th December 2006, the Pesticide Action Network UK (PAN UK) invited the director of the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) to deliver the Rachel Carson Memorial Lecture.

Camilla Toulmin emphasized the positive impacts that organic cotton projects, gaining increasing support from the high street, could have on real lives in West Africa.

This positive message was darkened by the threat that GM contamination represents for the farmers. While West Africa only accounts for around 5% of total world production, cotton provides 20-40% of their export earnings. With

the support of the US Agency for International Development (USAID), Monsanto has gained a foothold in Burkina Faso where farm trials of Bt cotton are underway. There is talk of Mali also deciding in favour of farm trials.

In the meantime, the verdict of a citizens' jury recently held in Mali was unanimously in favour of banning GM cotton. It remains to be seen how far their government will take such voices into account. A decision on whether to grow GM crops is likely to be delayed until after the 2007 elections in Mali, to avoid this becoming a party political issue.