

Thin Ice



the GM Freeze Campaign newsletter

Issue 37, September 2015

GM Wheat – a £1 million failure

In June, Hertfordshire-based, publically funded Rothamsted Research finally announced the “disappointing” results of its controversial “whiffy” wheat trial. The wheat was genetically modified to mimic an aphid distress signal, in order to repel aphids from the wheat and attract predators. However, as was widely predicted in objections at the time of the trial (including by GM Freeze), aphids in the field quickly adapted to ignore the signal.

Lab research had **already shown evidence** of this kind of habituation so there are big questions about why so much public money was spent on this trial.

PR Spin

The Rothamsted team, supported by the Science Media Centre and other GM advocates, made much of the security costs associated with the GM wheat trials. They also defended the value of negative results, which is a valid point on its own terms but rather less so when the nature of the trial’s failure was widely predicted, when it attracted significant public opposition and when the costs were borne by tax payers.

The solution is already out there

A wider concern about this trial, as with most new GM “ideas”, is that there are already agroecological solutions to the problem of aphid damage. Indeed, Rothamsted Research has itself been involved in developing very successful methods that control aphid populations in cereal and brassica crops by encouraging native pest predators with wildflower strips around the field (with its wider benefits to biodiversity), and periodically employing aphid-repelling pheromone sticks.

Funding priorities

In 2012, Prof John Pickett claimed that the wheat trial had a public mandate because of its approval by the public funding body the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council

(BBSRC), which backed the trial to the tune of £1 million. But in March 2014 **GM Watch revealed** the BBSRC’s long history of alignment with industry, with a director of the GM giant Syngenta sitting on its council along with a consultant for Dow Agro Science. Rothamsted Research itself regularly partners Syngenta and other giants like Bayer and Dupont.

Our response

Liz O’Neill, Director of GM Freeze, said: “A basic understanding of evolution tell us that GM offers, at best, a

sticking-plaster approach to complex and evolving problems. We know that pests are very good at adapting to their environment but, like the aphids in the trial, those promoting GM as the first-choice solution to our food and farming needs stopped listening to nature’s alarm signals as soon as they became inconvenient.”

Lincolnshire farmer and GM Freeze member Peter Lundgren was a vocal opponent at the time of the trials:

“Farmers know that there are no

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CAMELINA TRIAL

In July, hot on the heels of the failed wheat trial, the team at Rothamsted Research built up yet another press story about their trial of Camelina plants genetically modified to produce “fish oils”. The trial was making headlines before it was approved and has been the PR “poster child” for GM ever since. There were interviews to celebrate the trial’s approval, more to mark the day it went into the ground and another round when it was harvested. This latest round marked the publication of a few figures on that year one harvest. Given that the trial has another two years to run, it doesn’t involve any feeding trials and there are plants producing omega-3 fatty acids already in the national seed catalogues, it is hard not to conclude that this trial is more about positive spin for GM than seriously addressing the sustainability of our food.

Scotland to ban GM

On 9 August the Scottish Government announced it will **ban the growing of GM crops** in Scotland to preserve its ‘clean, green status’. Rural Affairs Secretary Richard Lochhead intends to take advantage of the European Union (EU) regulation which allow countries to opt-out of EU authorised GM crops. The move is not a great surprise as the Scottish Parliament has previously shown strong opposition to GM crops, but it has been strongly supported by a coalition of civil society organisations, including **Nourish Scotland** and Friends of the Earth Scotland.

By acting quickly, the Scottish Government will be able to make use of transitional arrangements that allow

EU member states and regions to prohibit the cultivation of the one GM maize already approved. As new crops come through the regulatory pipeline Scotland will have an opportunity to seek exemption from any authorisation that they receive.

This decision is good news for Scotland and Wales also has a restrictive stance on growing GM crops. However the pro-GM Westminster Government is very unlikely to follow suit in England. Lochhead said, “Scotland is known around the world for our beautiful natural environment - and banning growing genetically modified

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EFSA ignores 10 year maize pollen study

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) has refused to update its risk management recommendations to reflect a 10 year study that monitored maize pollen dispersal.

The Environmental Services Study last October found maize pollen dispersed over several kilometres and recommended that risk assessments of the impacts of GM pollen on butterflies and moths should be reviewed (see [Thin Ice 36](#)).

EFSA [maintains its position](#), that

GM maize should be separated from protected areas by 20 to 30 metres and calls for further research into the safety of GM maize.

Mute Schimpf, food campaigner at Friends of the Earth said: “The inability of EFSA to put safety first is not new news. Throughout their history they have sided with the biotech industry.

“The results of the biggest research into growing maize should have raised bigger alarms bells and more precaution.”

Herbicide spotlight

Following the World Health Organisation’s classification in March, of glyphosate as a probable carcinogen, its expert panel then classified another GMO-related herbicide, 2,4-D (2,4-dichlorophenoxyacetic acid), as [a possible carcinogen](#), in June. Bad news for anyone farming or eating Dow AgroSciences new ‘Enlist’ corn and soya which has been modified to tolerate spraying with both via Dow’s new ‘Enlist Duo’ herbicide.

Monsanto has also invested a billion dollars in a new herbicide containing dicamba. However, dicamba is a known environmental toxin and has been found in groundwater.

GM Freeze will be monitoring developments on these GM crop-related herbicides so please ensure you are signed up to our email alert list.

http://www.gmfreeze.org/join_us/email-signup/

GM insects a no go

UK company Oxitec has withdrawn its application to release GM olive flies (pictured below) in Spain after its second application failed to get approval



Salvatore D'Orto

this August.

Oxitec, self-described as “a pioneer in controlling insects that spread disease and damage crops” saw its first application fail in 2013. [Testbiotech reports](#) that regional authorities denied approval due to fears the insect mutation could spread uncontrolled throughout the Mediterranean area.

Meanwhile the House of Lords [Science and Technology Committee](#) has just finished taking evidence on its inquiry into the potential benefits of such insects.

BBC ‘experts’ are not trusted on GM

The BBC Panorama programme ‘GM Food – Cultivating Fear’ came under considerable criticism for the favourable way it portrayed issues around GM food and crops.

It dismissed concerns about GM and spoke to several ‘experts’ without revealing their connections to the biotech industry.

Subsequently, campaign group

Beyond GM surveyed 1,000 people and found that 70% did not trust the independence of experts featured on BBC programmes. Nearly 90% of the people surveyed felt that academics, researchers and other independent experts featured on BBC programmes should reveal their sources of income, corporate affiliations and whether or not they are patent holders.



Not in our bread

Glyphosate is closely associated with GM, with glyphosate tolerant “Roundup Ready” crops flying the flag for commercially successful GM. Now the Soil Association has launched a petition to urge UK bread manufacturers and retailers to stop using wheat sprayed with glyphosate.

Up to a third of our bread contains glyphosate and glyphosate use in UK farming has increased by 400% in the last 20 years. Three months ago the World Health Organisation designated glyphosate to be ‘probably carcinogenic’ to humans. So why is it in our bread?

The big chemical companies recommend that farmers spray their crops with glyphosate not only as a weedkiller, but also before harvest. Yet the industry’s own Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board says this can be a bad idea:

“Trials in England and Scotland showed no advantage where weed-free wheat crops were treated...”, the advice continues. “This highlights the potential risk of using pre-harvest glyphosate to ‘even up’ harvesting. Residues are likely to be higher if glyphosate is applied to such moist grain.”

Find out more at <http://www.soilassociation.org/notinourbread>

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

USA

Farmers in Josephine County, Oregon, USA had until this September to harvest or dispose of any GM crops being grown. This follows the passage of a **local measure** to ban the growing of GM crops. Anyone violating the ban could be subject to having their crops confiscated and destroyed, and would have to pay costs of the removal of the crop as well as costs for any damage done to other crops, according to the new measure.

Bangladesh

Despite Bt Brinjal having failed in Bangladesh for two years running, the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institution intends to apply to release a further 3 varieties. Supporters may remember that Bt Brinjal was the focus of the BBC's controversial Panorama programme 'GM Food: Cultivating Fear'. The BBC has come under fire for the bias of the programme, as reported by **Claire Robinson for GM Watch**.

Faisal Rahman, staff correspondent for the United News of Bangladesh (UNB) said that his own evidence from visiting and interviewing farmers cast serious doubts on the BBC's credibility.

India

India's state of **Karnataka has passed a Bill** which fixes the price of cotton seeds. The Minister of State for Agriculture, Krishna Byre Gowda tabled the Bill, which has yet to be enacted, and said 2013's transgenic and genetically-modified cotton crop failed on 60,450 hectares in a number of districts. It was very difficult to provide compensation to aggrieved farmers, as there were no provisions in the existing laws to compensate them in case of crop failure. As a special case, he said the government had compensated the farmers with Rs. 36.35 crore (approximately £3.6 billion).

Africa

The African Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) has **issued an appeal** to the

South African Government against the general release of Monsanto's so-called 'drought tolerant' GM maize. The ACB described the appeal as being "in its own interests, in the public interest and in the interest of protecting the environment." According to the ACB, the Executive Council (EC)'s approval is typical of GM decision-making, which simply reiterates and summarises information provided by Monsanto, which has a clear vested interest in the approval. Such "rubber stamping" is unlawful.

The EC is under a legal obligation to apply a risk averse and cautious approach, which takes into account uncertainties and the limits of current knowledge about the consequences of approving this GM maize for commercial production. The ACB is extremely concerned about the absence of peer reviewed scientific data supporting Monsanto's claims as well as the lack of consideration of the economic impacts on small farmers.

DARK times ahead for the USA

The 'DARK Act', designed to prevent the labelling of GM products, was passed by the United States House of Representatives (HR) this July causing dismay amongst the farmer, consumer and environmental groups who opposed it.

Friends of the Earth US Food and Technology Program Director, **Lisa Archer explains** more about HR 1599, the Safe and Accurate Food

Labelling Act of 2015, dubbed the 'Deny Americans the Right to Know Act'.

"This industry-backed bill ... prevents the Food and Drug Administration from implementing mandatory genetically engineered food [labelling], and allows food companies to continue misleading consumers by making 'natural' claims about foods containing GMOs. Representatives who voted for this industry dream bill [to become an Act]

have ignored the will of 93% of Americans who want GMO [labelling], and have blatantly attacked the ability of states to ensure our fundamental right to know what we are feeding our families."

Dodgy tactics

Lawmakers in the pockets of industry is nothing new but it

seems that industry-front groups have also **deceived grassroots voters** about the labelling law.

The Non-GMO report carries an account by Julie Freitas from California. She was called by the Coalition for Safe Affordable Food (one of seven front groups opposing labelling and organics) for her views. Julie supports GM labelling and, after some discussion, was asked if she'd sign a letter to her Representative in support of labelling legislation. The letter she received, written by the front group, had twisted her words to urge her Representative to support HR 1599.

It's not over

FOE's Lisa Archer still has hope: "We now call on the Senate to stand up to Big Food and chemical corporations and stand with the vast majority of Americans who want mandatory GMO [labelling] by defeating this undemocratic attempt to keep Americans in the dark."



Rally for the Right to Know, Hollywood FL, 26 March 2011

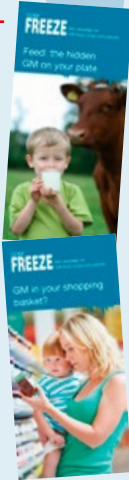
MillionsAgainstMonsanto

GET ACTIVE

Order your supply of our two new leaflets, *Feed: the hidden GM on your plate* and *GM in your shopping basket?* and help spread the word wherever you are.

These leaflets are written to appeal to people who know little or nothing about GM. They focus on the evidence-based case against GM crops, practical ways to avoid it in your own life and ideas for joining the campaign.

Copies of all leaflets are free to order, though we always appreciate donations to help cover postage. Just email raoul@gmfreeze.org, or call Raoul on 0845 217 8992, with your address and an estimate of how many of each leaflet you can use.



Consultation on GM food and feed bans

The Food Standards Agency is seeking public views on the European Commission's proposal to allow member states to restrict or ban the use of authorised GM food and feed products for non-safety reasons within their own territory. More details may be found here - www.food.gov.uk/news-updates/help-shape-our-policies/commission-proposal-gm-food-and-feed and the consultation is open till 28 October.

We are developing a detailed GM Freeze response and will share this to help our members and supporters make their own informed responses. If you would like to take part, please make sure you are signed up to receive email alerts from us: http://www.gmfreeze.org/join_us/email-signup/.

GM Freeze is working to help create a world in which our food is produced responsibly, fairly and sustainably. We consider and raise the profile of concerns about the impact of genetic modification. We inform, inspire, represent and support those who share our concerns. We campaign for a moratorium on GM food and farming in the UK. We oppose the patenting of genetic resources.



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We use an 0845 phone number to protect the privacy of our staff, who work from home. Calls to this number will cost 3p per minute plus your telephone company's Access Charge.

www.gmfreeze.org

GM Freeze in the media

Our comments on the failed GM wheat trial appeared in national newspapers including the Telegraph, Daily Mail, Express, Financial Times and Scotsman as well as regional papers, the BBC website and many others. GM Freeze Director Liz O'Neill was interviewed on BBC Radio 4's Farming Today and PM programmes and on BBC 5 Live Drive. Liz will also feature in a new programme *Tomorrow's Food*, to be broadcast sometime in November (despite being filmed on one of the very few hot days of the summer!). The interview with Dara O'Briain covered a lot of ground so we're not sure what will make it into the final programme but please sign up for our email updates at http://www.gmfreeze.org/join_us/email-signup/ or follow us on twitter @gmfreeze and we'll let you know as soon as we have a broadcast date.

You can find GM Freeze press releases, comments and details of press coverage featuring GM Freeze at www.gmfreeze.org/press.

SCOTLAND ... cont. from p1

crops will protect and further enhance our clean, green status.

"There is no evidence of significant demand for GM products by Scottish consumers and I am concerned that allowing GM crops to be grown in Scotland would damage our clean and green brand, thereby gambling with the future of our £14 billion food and drink sector... I have heard directly from food and drink producers in other countries that are ditching GM because of a consumer backlash.

"I strongly support the continued application of the precautionary principle in relation to GM crops... The Scottish Government has long-standing concerns about GM crops - concerns that are shared by other European countries and consumers, and which should not be dismissed lightly.

"I firmly believe that GM policy in Scotland should be guided by what's best for our economy and our own agricultural sector rather than the priorities of others."



WHEAT ... cont. from p1

quick fixes in pest control so must not be fooled by the GM industry's increasingly desperate attempts to persuade them that GM can deliver. The truth is that nature is just too complex for the simplistic thinking behind GM. Meanwhile, we are crying out for investment in proven solutions like integrated pest

management, companion cropping, conventional plant breeding, and novel chemistry. It's time to stop throwing good money after bad and put our publicly funded scientists to work on solutions that will give growers effective and financially viable options to control pests and the diseases they carry."