

10th May 2006

Derek Hampson  
Food Labelling and Marketing Terms Branch  
Consumer Choice, Food Standards  
and Special Project Division  
Food Standards Agency  
Room 115 Aviation House  
125 Kingsway  
London WC2B 6NH



Dear Mr Hampson,

**Public Consultation on Labelling Competitiveness, Consumer Information and Better Regulation**

Thanks you for inviting us to comment on the above consultation. I am responding on behalf of GM Freeze. I apologise for the late submission of our response.

*GM Freeze is an alliance of 50 organisations calling for a moratorium on GM foods, the growing of GM crops for any purpose and on patents on genetic resources in agriculture, food production and forestry until the need for and safety of GM technology has been established and alternative approaches have been fully evaluated.*

GM Freeze recognises that those purchasing food or feed can obtain information about what they are purchasing from a number of different and sources other than labelling on the packaging. However, despite advances in communications, the majority of people make judgements of what to buy at the time of purchase and therefore there is a strong case for maintaining the current system of on-pack information.

Different consumers are interested in different information about the food and feed they purchase covering issues from: the environment; to animal welfare; to safety; to health; to nutrition; to ethics; and to sustainability. GM Freeze believes and wording and symbols used to convey information must be clear and consistent across the EU.

**Country of Origin**

Purchasers of food and feed are getting more concerned about the sustainability, ethics and animal welfare aspects of the food and feed they are buying. Many people want to know where the ingredients originate because they are concerned such aspects as food miles, conditions of trade such as workers rights and pay, types of animal husbandry used and methods of production, for example GM and non-GM. GM Freeze would therefore support the inclusion of country of origin on the product labels. In the case of

GM production, consumers may wish to avoid produce from countries where GM crops are widely grown because of the greater potential for GM contamination in such imports or in order to avoid supporting a technology they fundamentally disagree with.

## **GMO Labelling**

GM Freeze welcomes the inclusion of GMO labelling in the EC consultation document. Although regulation EC 1829/2003 and EC 1830/2003 provides the mechanism by which the GM content of food and feed can be labelled, it does not fully meet the expectations of the EU population. Public attitude research has consistently demonstrated that there is overwhelming support for comprehensive labelling<sup>1</sup> of GMOs use in food production including products derived from poultry and livestock.

To meet the demands of the public, the GMO traceability and labelling regulations require amendment:

### **Label products derived from animals fed GM feed**

GMO products derived from animals such as eggs meat and milk should be labelled. The public is concerned about a number of issues which influence their purchasing behaviour when it comes to animal products: the ethics of genetic modification; the environmental and social impacts of the widespread growing of GM crops for animal feed; and the potential of health effects in animals and humans of the use of GM feed. As animal feed is the main use of GM crops in the EU, the exclusion of animal products from the GMO traceability and labelling regulations prevents consumer making informed decisions about what they purchase.

### **Thresholds and organic produce**

The adoption of the 0.9% GM adventitious or technically unavoidable presence threshold before labelling is required prevents a clear choice for all consumers of non-organic food. The proposed amendments to the EU organic regulations by the Commission which impose the 0.9% GM threshold on organic producers will further limit consumer choice. GM Freeze supports a lower GM threshold of 0.1% (not detectable) in all food and animal feed and call upon the EU to revise regulations 1829/2003 and 1830/2003 to introduce this lower threshold and to withdraw the current proposal for GM in organic products.

### **Enforcement of traceability and labelling at entry into the EU**

In 2005, GM freeze carried out a random survey of the UK local authorities responsible for the enforcement of the GMO Traceability and Labelling Regulations 2004 /2005. Our survey results indicated very low levels of enforcement at the ports and in consumer products and animal feed. We concluded that UK consumers could not rely on the enforcement procedures to guarantee that the labelling on products was accurate and to ensure that only approved GMOs (under 1829/2003 and Directive 2001/18) were present.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.ncc.org.uk/cgi-bin/kmdb/-load75977\\_viewcurrent.htm](http://www.ncc.org.uk/cgi-bin/kmdb/-load75977_viewcurrent.htm)

We suggest that the EC report on the implementation of the GMO labelling provisions for food and feed (mentioned in paragraph 40 of the DG SANCO Consultative Document) focuses on the level enforcement at national and local level in member states and considers whether these are adequate to enforce the labelling and traceability rules and prevent unauthorised GMOs entering the EU considering the number of different products imported into Member States from third countries each year.

Our survey report (a copy of which is enclosed and can be downloaded from [http://www.gmfreeze.org/admin/uploads/report\\_doc.pdf](http://www.gmfreeze.org/admin/uploads/report_doc.pdf)) also concluded that monitoring of incoming cargoes at all points of entry in the UK would be the most cost effective way of enforcing the traceability and labelling regulations and preventing unauthorised GMOs entering the country. Sampling food or feed or ingredients at point of manufacture or sale would still be required to ensure that traceability schemes for approved GMOs were being adhered to. The costs of developing monitoring systems at ports and other points of entry for food and feed imports should be weighed against the costs to coping with an unauthorised GMO entering the food chain to the FSA and industry. If such a GMO was not detected until the consumer product was being retailed, several million individual packs could need to be withdrawn by several different manufacturers. The experience of the Starlink incident in the USA in 2000 suggests<sup>23</sup> costs will be huge merely to recall the products and purge supply chains. However, now that GM pharmaceutical and industrial crops are being developed in the US, the potential for contamination of food and feed with significant public health implications cannot be ruled out. Indeed in 2002, the US Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service were forced to take action when GM maize plants modified for pharmaceutical products developed by Prodigene were found growing in a non-GM soya food crop<sup>4</sup>.

**Ingredients in Animal Feed**

GM Freeze also feels the EC should review the regulations on labelling the ingredients in animal feed so they are the same as for food for human consumption. For instance, we do not consider that the current labelling requirement giving merely total protein content without any information about the source of the protein or country of origin is adequate to allow farmers to safeguard the quality of their final products or to make ethical and sustainability based decisions.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, we welcome the EC review of labelling of food and other products because it is key to providing consumers and farmers with information they need to make informed decisions. Pack labelling remains an

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<sup>2</sup> Schuff, S. 2001. *Major seed companies say they have StarLink isolated*. 12 March. Feedstuffs.

<sup>3</sup> Elias, P.. *Biotech firms pay \$110 million to settle StarLink lawsuit*, 7th 2003 February, Associated Press. [http://ipm.osu.edu/trans/023\\_071.htm](http://ipm.osu.edu/trans/023_071.htm)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/lpa/news/2002/11/prodigene.html>

important source of information. It needs to be simple and clear but comprehensive. GMO labelling and traceability regulations require amendment to lower the GM threshold for labelling to not detectable at 0.1% and to include animal products from GM fed herds and flocks. UK enforcement procedures require immediate review and changes to ensure that labels are accurate and no unauthorised GMOs are allowed to enter the food chain.

I confirm that GM Freeze is happy for our response to be made public.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pete Riley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Pete Riley  
Campaign Director