

Thin Ice



the GM Freeze Campaign newsletter

Issue 45 September 2017

The great pesticide fiasco

It can't be much fun being Monsanto and certainly not at the moment. This July has seen two of its top herbicides in big trouble.

The subject of a [class action lawsuit](#), Monsanto in the US is challenged by hundreds of complaints of damage by its herbicide dicamba over the last two growing seasons. So far this year, more than 800 [farmers in Arkansas](#), Tennessee and Missouri have lodged complaints with state agriculture officials claiming that dicamba used by other growers damaged their crops.

Monsanto first released dicamba-tolerant cotton in 2015 and brought out dicamba-resistant soya last year. These crops were designed to be used with a new form of dicamba, which is supposed to be less volatile, so it doesn't drift on the wind. But this new dicamba wasn't approved until late 2016. So for the last two years growers have been using older, more volatile forms of dicamba on their dicamba-resistant crops. This leaves their own fields unharmed but jeopardises the non-resistant crops of other nearby growers.

Monsanto has publicly urged growers not to spray the old dicamba but is accused of secretly giving



Dicamba damage causes 'leaf cupping'

farmers assurances that using unauthorised or 'off-label' spray varieties would be all right. The lawsuit claims *"This was Monsanto's real plan: publicly appear as if it were complying, while allowing its seed representatives to tell farmers the opposite in person... Their sales pitch: assure purchasers that off-label and illegal uses of dicamba would 'be just fine.'"* 2017 has also seen a rise in the alleged misuse of this herbicide.

The lawsuit claims that this damage was a foreseeable consequence of the 'much larger rollout' of dicamba

products. Weed and crop science experts from the affected areas continue to be concerned about their tendency to vapourise and drift – even when applied properly. The rules governing the 'proper' use of dicamba are very complex – it can't be used when it's too windy, it can't be sprayed too slowly, among many other factors. University of Tennessee weed management expert Larry Steckel said in the lawsuit, *"[the rules] looks good on paper, but when a*

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GM crops – their fate is in Juncker's hands

In July, we asked you to contact EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker to persuade him to make European fields GM-free for the foreseeable future. Member States (the countries of the EU) have failed to achieve the required qualified majority vote either in favour of or against applications to approve three strains of GM maize crop for cultivation, including the re-approval of the one GM maize crop currently allowed to be grown in the EU. Having exhausted the prescribed number of votes without

a decision that meets EU rules, the decision now falls to Juncker.

Thousands of campaigners from across Europe have been asking him to reject these crops. The majority of EU Member States are against GM crops. Most of the European public strongly objects. Obviously, big business is strongly in support. This stand-off is 10 years old. Member States have also failed to agree on licences for importing GM soya beans which are resistant to multiple herbicides.

But the battle isn't over yet. Juncker

has not yet made his decision so there could still be a big win in this for us all. Please contact him as soon as you can.

TAKE ACTION

Write to President Juncker at – European Commission, Rue de la Loi / Wetstraat 200, 1049 Brussels, Belgium

You can email him on president.juncker@ec.europa.eu or contact him via Twitter or Facebook handle @JunckerEU.

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farmer or applicator is trying to actually execute that over thousands of acres covering several counties, it's almost impossible.'

The suit says the defendants "actually benefit" from rampant drift, because it pressures farmers to adopt dicamba-tolerant seed to avoid damage. Divisions are growing between those defending the technology and others who don't want to be forced to use it.

On 11 July, Arkansas officials implemented an emergency temporary ban on dicamba due to the alleged damage. In a new twist, some farmers in Arkansas have now [filed a lawsuit](#) against Monsanto because they can't use dicamba. One of the three lawyers who filed the suit said, "We're saying we bought these materials, paid premium prices for the technology, and now we're out [of] both the money and the technology." It seems Monsanto is in trouble both coming and going.

Glypho-gate goes on

Back over the pond in Europe, Monsanto's top-selling herbicide glyphosate is in the spotlight again. New research by [Corporate Europe Observatory](#) (CEO) shows that the agrichemical industry had advance access to the European Food Safety Authority's (EFSA) safety assessment of glyphosate.

In 2015, the World Health Organisation's International Agency for Research against Cancer declared that glyphosate probably causes cancer in humans. EFSA's own assessment said it was 'unlikely', which was welcomed by the industry. CEO has uncovered emails that show industry representatives not only had access to EFSA's documents but also could edit them by adding or removing text.

EFSA says this is standard practice. But it sits oddly when non-government organisations are denied similar access to research documents and safety assessments, apparently to 'protect the integrity of the decision-making process'.

While it is laudable for regulators to try to protect the integrity of their work from the influence of third parties, it is self-defeating that such privileged access is given to the party with the highest interest in achieving a positive evaluation.

New GM Freeze website



Our website www.gmfreeze.org has been a key public face for the campaign against GM for many years and now it's been completely re-built, thanks to a generous grant from Lush Charity Pot. Re-designed to help direct people more quickly to what they want to know, the new site is also fully "responsive". This means that the layout changes depending on what size screen you are using the view the site, making it much more mobile-friendly. We also have a

new online payment system that we hope you will find more user-friendly as well as welcoming the fact that it will cost us much less in commission than our old paypal system!

The site has just gone live and these things always experience some teething problems (no matter how much user-testing we've done!) so do please let us know if you spot anything amiss on the new site. The easiest way to do that is by emailing liz@gmfreeze.org.

Feed me – at events

The Truth, as in our *Feed me the Truth* campaign, has been on the road this summer visiting a number of festivals and events.

We started in June, with a warm welcome at the Green Scythe Fair in Muchelney. We talked to about 50 people over the day, telling them about the campaign and taking their pictures. Many visitors used their blindfolded picture to post their own message to their favourite supermarket. In August we went to the Green Gathering in Chepstow where we focussed on Lidl. Lidl Germany is increasingly providing non GM-fed products to its customers, including milk, eggs and poultry – so why not here in the UK? Again, we had a great response.

We will also be at the Eat Clean Fair in Yate on 10 September so do

look out for us if you're in the area. You can see our picture galleries at www.facebook.com/GMFreezeUK/photos/.



Celebrating 2016/17

March 2017 saw the end of the second year of work under our Strategic Plan 2015-2020. [Our annual report](#) for the year will be discussed at the AGM but here we take a quick look at how we've done and what we have planned for the future.

Protecting our right to grow and eat GM-free

Throughout the year we actively opposed plans to authorise three GM maize crops for cultivation in the European Union (EU). This fight continues but our work and your support of it has helped ensure that the national "opt-outs" agreed in 2015 do not mean an open door to GM elsewhere in Europe.

The UK's vote to leave the EU could change everything. The Westminster Government is firmly pro-GM so the laws that protect our right to choose non-GM are unlikely to survive the Brexit process without a fight. We are already working with UK and EU colleagues to protect the integrity of our food, farms and crops as the UK leaves the EU and priorities for the coming year include:

- standing firm against EU and UK proposals to grow new GM crops
- campaigning for proper regulation and labelling of all forms of GM, including newer technologies like gene editing

Presenting evidence against GM

While debate about GM crop cultivation takes place at the EU level, the UK controls whether open air field trials gain consent and there's been a huge push on these in the past year. In December, we led objections to a new trial of GM wheat that was hyped as "sprinkled with gold dust". Then in March, we co-ordinated another multi-agency objection, this time to a new GM potato trial which had not even been completed in the lab. Both trials were given consent, but only after receiving enough objections to ensure that our voices are being heard loud and clear.

This area of work is very much about responding to what happens but over the coming year we expect to:

- engage in official processes where we can

- enable our supporters and other organisations to collaborate on multi-agency efforts
- raise our concerns through official channels, the traditional media and all forms of electronic communication

Raising awareness of GM in the UK

GM Freeze is the only UK organisation actively campaigning on GM ingredients and animal feed. This year we liaised with Trading Standards offices, and supported others to do the same, over breaches of labelling laws on GM ingredients and cooking oils.

However, the primary use of GM crops in the UK is in animal feed, as highlighted by our [Feed me the Truth](#) campaign which launched in October 2016. Shining the spotlight on poor performance by the UK's top ten supermarkets, Feed me the Truth demands improvements in policy, information for consumers and provision of non GM-fed products like eggs, meat and dairy products.

Feed me the Truth continues throughout 2017 and plans for the coming months include:

- building public pressure on the supermarkets
- taking the campaign on the road with stalls at events around the country
- New ways to take part online via social media and our new website

Helping others to share their concerns about GM

Concern about GM is widely misunderstood and frequently characterised as hysterical, ill-informed, even superstitious. GM Freeze counters these damaging assumptions by providing well-referenced, factual and clearly presented arguments against GM.

In May 2016 we gave evidence to the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee's [Science](#)

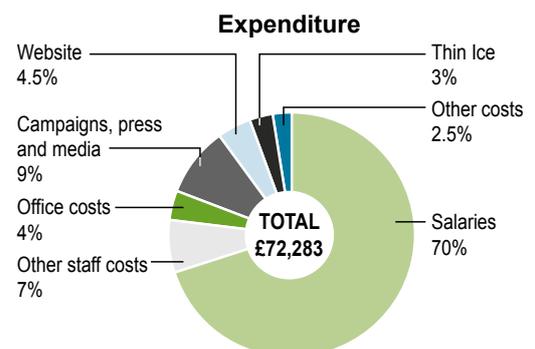
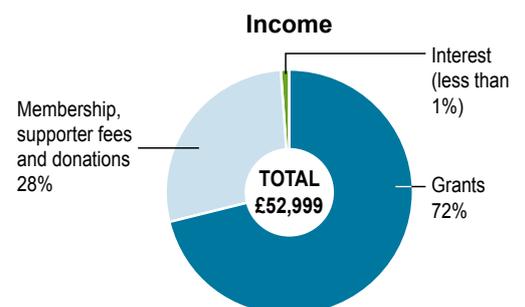
[Communication Inquiry](#), highlighting the way that social and ethical concerns about GM are excluded from the regulatory process and side-lined by the media. Since then we have been working with academics from the Universities of Nottingham, Sheffield and Exeter to explore these issues further. We published a report in October 2016 and an academic paper is currently in process.

Meeting fellow campaigners is a key way to help increase all of our skills and GM Freeze team members have done just that throughout the year. We appeared at the Green Gathering, the Oxford Real Farming Conference, Friends of the Earth campaigner gatherings and the Global Greens Congress.

Plans for the coming year include:

- A full academic paper providing rigour to our position that social and ethical concerns about GM are being deliberately side-lined
- Our brand new website
- Free copies of our easy-to-read leaflets for everyone who can use them

Our finances 2016/17



£9,154 of grant income received in 2015/16 was carried forward into 2016/7 for ongoing work.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

India

In 2016, the government of the state of Maharashtra set up the Vasant Rao Naik Sheti Swavlamban Mission to provide crop loans to farmers, in an attempt to stop them taking their own lives in response to poverty, debt and crop failures. In July 2017 its Chairman Kishore Tiwari [squarely blamed the Indian Government](#) for implementing policies that led to the hundreds of farmers committing suicide. He said, *"The downtrend started in 2006 when Bt cotton was introduced. It was used extensively by farmers [across the state]. It led to massive economic losses, from which they never [recovered]. Subsequently, mounting debts and distress took their toll... Multinational companies showed them big [dreams] about crops like Bt cotton and ruined their lives completely. The entire cotton rich belt failed to get good yield due to usage of such seeds provided by the MNCs. Other factors like rising inflation, school fees and health care charges also added to their woes."*



Canada

The [Canadian federal government](#) has confirmed that the

company AquaBounty does not yet have federal approval to grow GM salmon at Rollo Bay in Prince Edward Island (PEI), contrary to reports that such assessment wasn't necessary. In 2013 then-Ministers had waived the requirement for data on the toxicity and invasiveness of the fish.

"Once again, Islanders have been surprised by new information about this company's plans, and we've had enough." said Sharon Labchuk, Earth Action PEI. *"We need to see a precautionary and transparent scientific assessment of the environmental risks before this GM salmon is produced,"* said Mark Butler of Ecology Action Centre (EAC) in neighbouring Nova Scotia. *"We're very concerned about the risks to wild Atlantic salmon."*

Ireland

Ireland should work to have all-island status as GMO-free to maintain biodiversity, according to Minister of State for Agriculture Andrew Doyle. He announced in late July that 'the island' (as he put it) could be a reservoir of [GM-free seed varieties](#) in the event of an international food scare. This personal opinion is contrary to the 'follow the science' view of the Irish Agricultural and Food Development Authority. Speaking of mainstream arable crops like wheat, oats and barley, he said it would be easier for Ireland to isolate and keep seed varieties GM-free. He says, *"The wind can cross-contaminate. But on an island off the continent on the west coast of Europe where the prevailing wind is, not always but mainly south-westerly, it doesn't tend to blow from any other land mass."*

Gove to the rescue? Cabinet split on food standards

Environment Secretary Michael Gove has said the UK Government would back out of any US trade that required a lowering of standards. In a surprise to many, he indicated that lowering environmental or agricultural standards would be a [deal-breaker](#). Speaking to WWF he said, *"... We need to be in a position as we leave the European Union to be leaders in environmental and in animal welfare standards."*

Previously, Trade Secretary Liam Fox asserted that the UK could accept products like chlorinated chicken and protect its standards because there was no clear health risk. Campaign groups, the poultry industry and opposition politicians called for more clarity on the deal over concerns that any food deal could potentially open the door for chlorine-washed chicken, hormone-fed beef and [GM crops](#) to be imported into the UK. Any relaxation of current standards will jeopardise future UK exports to Europe.

Come and meet us

All members and supporters are warmly invited to our Annual General Meeting on Thursday 19 October at 2pm. We will be at Friends of the Earth, The Printworks, 139 Clapham Road, London SW9 0HP. We'd love to meet you, so do let us know if you'd like to come along.

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.



A referenced version of this newsletter is available online – www.gmfreeze.org/thinice

 /GMFreezeUK

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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