

GM Freeze

Minutes of Annual General Meeting

Thursday 7 November 2019, 1.30pm

Friend of the Earth, The Printworks, 139 Clapham Road,
London SW9 OHP



Members attending: Bruce Pearce, Organic Research Centre
Charlotte Bickler, Organic Research Centre
Helena Paul, Econexus
Jane O'Meara, GM Free Dorset
Kierra Box, Friends of the Earth
Louise Payton, Soil Association
Ricarda Steinbrecher, Scientists for Global Responsibility

Supporters attending: Linda Kaucher
Suzanna van Moyland
Tessa Burrington

In attendance: Clare Coatman, GM Freeze Management Committee (Chair)
Honor Eldridge, GM Freeze Management Committee
Liz O'Neill, GM Freeze staff
Vicky Hart, GM Freeze staff (minutes)

1. Welcome and introductions (Clare Coatman, Chair of GM Freeze Management Committee)

Supporters and member organisation representatives shared a brief introduction to their involvement with GM Freeze and what it means to them.

2. Apologies and notification of any other business

Apologies were received from:

Bruce Nixon
Cherry Lavell
Eva Novotny
Jane Cotter

No other business was proposed.

3. Approval of the Minutes of the AGM held on 30 November 2018

The minutes were approved as an accurate record and a hard copy signed.

4. Annual Report and questions from the floor (Clare Coatman, Chair)

A summary review of the year had been included in the September 2019 issue of *Thin Ice*, while the full annual report was published ahead of the meeting on the GM Freeze website. Paper copies of both were available at the meeting.

Clare presented highlights from the year April 2018 to March 2019, including the following points.

- **Protecting our food and our farms after Brexit.** Our big campaigning focus during 2018/19 was, for the second year, Brexit. We continued to focus on three key demands: Robust regulation to protect people, animals and the environment; GM labelling to allow people to take control of what they are eating; Proper protection from GM contamination. We continued promoting those key messages through our twin campaign identities: *Safeguard our Farms* and *Don't Hide What's Inside*.
- **Consultations.** As mentioned at last year's AGM, a big area of work for our Brexit campaign has been responding to consultations. This year we have responded to eight separate consultations. Our submissions focused on the need for robust GM regulation, proper protection from GM contamination; and clear labelling.
- **Labelling Petition.** In September 2018 we launched the *Don't Hide What's Inside* petition to protect our GM food labels, working with Beyond GM to help reach a wider audience. So far, we have received over 4,600 signatures including lots of people who had never interacted with GM Freeze before, thanks to a very successful series of Facebook adverts. Since the end of the financial year we have created an online poll asking *Who should pay to safeguard our farms?* We took both the petition and the poll to summer festivals and the recent Food, Farming and Climate Justice march in London.
- **Challenging GM Crop Trials.** GM Freeze has long led the response to UK GM field trials. At the start of 2019, four different crop trial applications were lodged – each with about 50 pages of technical detail. We appealed for donations and received over nearly £3,000 which allowed us to submit detailed, technical and fully referenced objections to all four trials on behalf of over 30 organisations. We also produced “plain English” guides to help others make their voices heard. All four trials went ahead but with some changes to the conditions and a clear message that opposition to GM has not gone away.
- **European Court of Justice Ruling.** In July 2018, the ECJ ruled that new forms of genetic engineering are GM and must be regulated as such. In response, we demanded the immediate halt of Rothamsted Research’s open field trial of genome edited plants that had not been through the GM consent process. A few months later farming minister George Eustice admitted we were right, but Rothamsted then sought and received consent for a similar trial in early 2019. The ECJ ruling was a huge success but the biotech lobby is now campaigning hard to get the key piece of European law (Directive 2001/18/EC) that had been under scrutiny changed. GM Freeze is supporting colleagues across the EU in standing up to this approach but there is a big fight ahead.

Questions followed about the extent that GM Freeze is collaborating with European groups. It was discussed that one of the outcomes of Brexit is that work has a large UK focus, though it was stated that there is online sharing of information with European groups. It was asked whether there was anyone checking for escaped contamination from the GM Field trials. It was concluded that there wasn’t anyone at present doing this, but it would be a good piece of work for GM Freeze or another organisation to take up if funding could be secured.

5. Treasurer's Report (Bruce Pearce, Treasurer)

Bruce presented figures from the 2018/19 accounts. We finished the year with a good surplus, which was largely achieved through reduction in expenditure and a good level of donations (including a one-off donation of £10,000). Our overall financial position at year end was much better than in 2017/18 but we are still very vulnerable to changes in grant income. It has been indicated that we will not get repeat funding from some sources, so we have a big income gap to fill this year. This highlights the importance of the financial support from our members and supporters, through direct financial contributions but also introductions and recommendations to potential funders.

6. A new strategy for uncertain times (Liz O'Neill, Director)

Liz presented a summary of GM Freeze plans for the coming year. For GM Freeze the four main issues are: Brexit; the General Election – and UK politics more generally; new GM techniques; and resources (specifically finding new sources of funding).

The Management Committee recently developed a new GM Freeze strategy based on five key aims:

- opposing the cultivation, import, production and sale of GM crops
- campaigning for greater transparency around GM
- working to change the narrative to win public support
- providing an umbrella to support the building of networks
- improving our own effectiveness as an organisation.

A new set of guiding principles were also agreed, that will be used to assess competing demands on GM Freeze's time and resources. What that means in practice right now is that GM Freeze is working on:

- The fine detail of exactly what GM regulation needs to include
- A General Election manifesto
- A project to explore the feasibility of a new way of bringing organisations together
- A big drive to bring more funding to GM Freeze to secure our ability to deliver on our strategic objectives.

A discussion followed about public opinion and whether any work was being done to counteract the pro-GM propaganda. GM Freeze is seeking funding for a framing project that would work to counteract this.

7. Election of the Management Committee

Kierra Box (representing FOE), Louise Payton (representing Soil Association) and Jane O'Meara (representing GM Free Dorset) all stood down from the committee and re-stood for election.

The GM Freeze articles of association state that the management committee should have between five and ten representatives of member organisations. Bruce Pearce (representing ORC) and Ricarda Steinbrecher (representing Econexus) were both re-elected to the committee in 2018 so the total number of nominations received did not exceed the number of vacancies.

The AGM unanimously voted to accept all nominations to the management committee.

It was noted that the newly elected management committee would meet immediately following the close of this meeting to discuss the continued co-option of Honor Elridge to the board and to elect a Chair and Treasurer.

8. Any other AGM business

Bruce paid respect to Martin Wolfe who died in March. He was a great supporter and did a lot of work for the field as a pioneer of diversity farming.

Clare offered a vote of thanks to the management committee, all members and supporters and staff members who served during the year. Thanks were noted from the floor to Clare for chairing the AGM and for her work leading the management committee throughout the year.

Close of formal business

9. Friendly debate about what needs to be included in regulations designed to safeguard our food and our farms.

Those attending discussed a range of issues around the question “Could a new definition of GM help create strong regulation for the UK?”.

10. Information-sharing and discussion session – open to all.

Ricarda Steinbrecher reminded those present that the European Network of Scientists for Social and Environmental Responsibility (ENSSER)’s report on gene drives is available to download from <https://ensser.org/tag/gene-drives/>.