

NEWS RELEASE

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For immediate release

Irish businesses, farmers, consumers and religious groups urge Government to vote against legalisation of GM food in the EU on Monday 8 December 2003

Dublin, Ireland, 5 December 2003 (GM-free Ireland, c/o Global Vision Consulting Ltd.)

GM-free Ireland – a newly formed network of Irish businesses, farming bodies, Non Governmental Organisations, religious groups and citizens – is urging the Irish Government to reverse its decision to vote in favour of the first EU-wide commercial release of Syngenta's genetically modified Bt-11 sweet corn for food and animal feed, scheduled to take place at a crucial meeting of the EU Standing Committee of the Food Chain and Animal Health on Monday 8 December 2003.

The vote was postponed at an earlier meeting in November because of all 15 EU countries, only Ireland the UK and 2 others were in favour of legalisation. After a flurry of political arm twisting in Brussels, the vote on Monday is expected to be close, so Ireland's decision could be decisive.

Approval this time around would effectively end Europe's GM moratorium, caving in to the "Coalition Against Nature" (USA, Canada and Argentina) which are taking the EU to the World Trade Organisation for refusing to authorise GM food and GMOs since 1998.

GM-free Ireland campaign co-ordinator Michael O'Callaghan says that legalising the use of GM food and animal feed in Ireland would seriously compromise the health of consumers, and the economic value of Irish livestock exports, which currently benefit from Ireland's famous green image as one of the three least polluted countries in the world.

Legalisation of GM food and animal feed is a Trojan horse that could soon be followed by genetically modified living organisms (GMOs) including GM seeds, crops and livestock which would be irreversible as there is no way to stop GMOs from spreading after their release. Conventional farmers would certainly be contaminated, organic farmers could be ruined, and no insurance company will cover their losses – or those of GM farmers and distributors who are likely to face expensive lawsuits for contaminating their neighbours and reducing the economic value of their landholdings and brand identities.

GM-free Ireland is urging the Government to vote against the measure on Monday because:

- serious scientific questions have been raised over the genetic modification procedure used by Syngenta;
- a new report by the Austrian Government criticizes the science used for safety claims;
- Bt maize ignores new EU safety regulations;
- Bt maize fails to meet the EU's new food safety laws on cumulative toxic effects and health sensitivities of consumers;
- GM contamination of animal feed will lower the quality and economic value of Irish beef and lamb exports;
- there are no liability regimes in place;
- legalising GM food and feed would require expensive traceability and labelling procedures;
- insurance companies rate GM risks equal to terrorism and will not cover GM disasters;
- Irish consumers don't want GM food;
- Ireland should leverage our famous green image and become a GM-free zone.

O'Callaghan points out the hypocrisy of Fianna Fáil, whose current pro-GM policy violates its 1997 election campaign promise:

"Fianna Fáil will not support what amounts to the largest nutritional experiment in human history with the consumer as guinea pig... The rush to market with genetically modified foods is unscientific, unseemly and premature. Prevention is wise because cure is impossible. Genetically modified organisms once released can never be recalled."

But after returning to power in 1998, Fianna Fáil promptly executed a policy U-turn claiming that "the area of Irish economic interest where biotechnology... has greatest potential is in agriculture." Unlike the Green Party and Sinn Fein which oppose GMOs, Fianna Fáil is now leading the charge to compromise Irish food security for generations to come.

At the recent **European NGO Network on Genetic Engineering (GENET)** Conference in Vienna (Nov. 2003), Michael O'Callaghan called "for the formation of a world panel of eminent scientists to refute the biotech lobby's pseudo-scientific claims that GMOs are safe." He said these claims are based on the outdated reductionist paradigm which ignores 30 years of new scientific insights in molecular biology, ecology, complexity theory, and the emergent properties of complex systems:

"Every schoolchild ought to know that mixing genes from different bacteria, viruses, plants and animals is asking for trouble. There is no need for 'new scientific evidence' to prove GM dangers because we already know the ecological and health risks of GMOs are unpredictable; no-one can possibly know what long-term effects GM foods and transgenic plants and animals will have on the global ecosystem and the health and survival of future generations. We mustn't let the biotech lobby's desperate need for markets continue to set the agenda by demanding new scientific evidence of dangers.

The time has come for civil society to set our agenda and end this GM nonsense which is giving science a bad name. Rather than caving in to the giant transnational biotech companies and the WTO, Ireland should simply stand up for its legal rights – as specified in the **Precautionary Principle** which is enshrined in EU law, the **Biosafety Protocol**, and the **EU Directive on GMOs** - and say no to GMOs once and for all, before it is too late.”

The **Biosafety Protocol** – to which Ireland is a party – recognises Ireland’s legal right to prohibit or restrict the importation of GMOs when there is scientific uncertainty about their short to long-term safety. Article 19 of the **EU Directive on GMOs** (2001/18/EC) allows for specific environments, ecosystems and geographical areas to be exempt from GM crops.

Ireland should follow the lead of other EU countries – especially quality food exporters and eco-tourist destinations – who are already using these laws to set up hundreds of GM-free zones including provinces, municipalities, local authorities and national parks. GM-free Ireland is keen to have the Wicklow Mountains National Park become Ireland’s first GM-free zone, and calls for the Catholic and Protestant church organisations to sign covenants to protect the value of their landholdings by declaring them GM-free.

GM-free Ireland is also asking Irish food companies to follow the lead of major brands in Germany which have signed agreements to remain GM free because consumers refuse GM food (these include Coca-Cola, Campbells, General Mills, H.J. Heinz, Karlsberg, Kelloggs, Kraft Foods, Nestlé, Pepsi-Cola, Procter and Gamble, Sara Lee, and Unilever). Imagine the boost to Ireland’s image if Guinness goes GM-free!

Citizens and organisations opposed to the GM invasion of Ireland are invited to attend a picket at the Dáil’s Kildare Street entrance at 11.30am on Wednesday 10 December to ask the Government to:

- vote against any legalisation of GM seeds, food, animal feed, crops and livestock in Ireland and the EU;
- provide legal advice and administrative support for Irish County Councils, National Parks, municipalities, farms and other local areas which want to remain GM-free;
- include NGOs in the Food Safety Authority of Ireland and EPA committees which decide GM policy;
- exercise Ireland's right under the Biosafety Protocol to declare the Republic a GM-free zone;
- work with the North of Ireland to extend GM-free status to the whole island of Ireland.

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background information

Friends of the Earth Europe has issued 10 reasons why EU states should vote against the legalisation of genetically modified (GM) sweet corn on Monday 8 December 2003:

The European Commission, who failed to gather sufficient support at a previous meeting in November, will push for a vote on the sweet corn at Monday's meeting of the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health. If approved, unprocessed GM sweet corn will be allowed into shops, breaking Europe's moratorium on GM food.

Friends of the Earth has raised serious questions about the safety studies carried out and the process the Commission is using. In particular FOE highlights that:

1. Question marks exist over the genetic modification

New research by the Belgium authorities questions the quality of the work done by Syngenta to identify whether the genes had been inserted as expected.

2. A new report attacks the safety research

A new report by the Austrian Government gives a damning verdict for the Bt11 application, concluding that the whole plant was not tested, the assumptions made by the biotech company were false and the safety of Bt 11 is based on theoretical argument rather than evidence.

3. It ignores new regulations.

Bt11 maize is being pushed through the old Novel Food Regulations even though new laws improving the approval process become applicable in April. The new regulations also require a post-approval safety monitoring plan.

4. It fails to meet new food safety criteria

New EU food law requires that the effects on subsequent generations, cumulative toxic effects and also the effects on the health sensitivities of consumers need to be taken into account. These legal requirements have not been done.

The full list of 10 reasons can be found on the next page of this press release, and at: www.foeeurope.org

Adrian Bebb of Friends of the Earth Europe said:

"There are too many question marks hanging over this food. European countries should reject it outright and demand proper testing to ensure that this GM sweet corn poses no threat to our health. Instead of the Commission protecting the interests of the public they are trying to ram through GM foods using out-dated laws under pressure from the US."

FRIENDS OF THE EARTH EUROPE

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**Friends of
the Earth
Europe**

BRIEFING ON GENETICALLY MODIFIED SWEET CORN

10 reasons not to approve Bt11 Sweet Corn

The European Commission wants the EU Member States to approve a controversial genetically modified (GMO) sweet corn. However serious questions remain over its safety and also the process the Commission is using. This briefing gives 10 good reasons why member states should not approve Syngenta's Bt11 sweet corn.

1. Question marks over the genetic modification

New research by the Belgium authorities questions the quality of the work done by Syngenta to identify whether the genes had been inserted as expected. They found that there were "uncertainties concerning the molecular data", unexpected DNA fragments present which need investigating and that Bt11 might be contaminated by an earlier GMO (Bt176).ⁱ

2. New report attacks the safety research

A new report by the Austrian Government gives a damning verdict for the Bt11 application.ⁱⁱ The researchers had access to the whole dossier and accompanying documentation. They conclude that:

- there was no toxicological testing with the whole plant
- there were no tests on the long terms effects of eating the novel protein
- the test for allergic reactions are insufficient and that many assumptions argued by Syngenta are false
- the safety of Bt 11 is based on theoretical argument rather than evidence.

This report seriously questions the quality of the work carried out by the EU's old Scientific Committee on Foods (SCF) who gave a positive opinion to Bt11.

3. Growing concerns over allergies from Bt toxins

Recently published evidence indicates that Bt toxins may have allergenic properties. In addition, scientists working for the US Food and Drug Administration concluded that the similarity between the amino acids of the Bt toxin and of a common egg yolk allergen "might be sufficient to warrant additional evaluation". None were done. Furthermore, the allergy testing used would not meet the standards developed by the FAO/WHO. The EU's SCF opinion fails to even mention allergies from the Bt toxin.

4. The EU's scientific opinion raises unanswered questions

Although the SCF gave a positive verdict, the opinion they gave raised more questions than answers with many arguments based on pure assumptions. SCF concluded that it was "of the opinion that despite the large number of studies, the company (Syngenta) did not commission systematic information on the composition of the genetically modified or control plants". In fact, the SCF states that the evidence provided by Syngenta "provide only limited evidence for safety". In the absence of adequate data from the applicant, the SCF appears instead to have relied on:

- the fact that there were no "visible adverse effects" when livestock were fed Bt 11 maize for "a few weeks"
- a study conducted on Bt tomatoes
- an unpublished, two-week study on mice.

5. Ignores new regulations.

Bt11 maize is being pushed through the old Novel Food Regulations even though new laws improving the approval process become applicable in April. There is therefore no guarantee that a labelling and traceability regime will be in place when foods reach the supermarkets. The new regulations also require a post-approval safety monitoring plan.

6. Fails to meet new food safety criteria

New EU food law requires that foods that are placed on the market are not injurious to health. Article 14(4) of EC Regulation 178/2002 explicitly states that not only the short- or long-term effects must be taken into account, but also effects on subsequent generations, cumulative toxic effects and also the effects on health sensitive consumers. Proceeding with the approval of Bt11 sweet maize under the Novel Foods procedures bypasses this level of scrutiny and precaution.

7. No transparency

Improving openness and transparency in the approval process is a key step to building public trust in the decisions and recommendations made. The Novel Foods Regulations allow the public no access to the dossiers submitted by the biotech industry. Proceeding with applications under these regulations allows decisions to be made in virtual secrecy.

8. Traceability and Labelling

According to article 8 of the EC Regulation 1830/2003 concerning traceability and labelling of GMOs, a system for development and assignment of unique identifiers to GMOs has to be put in place. Such system does not exist yet. It might therefore take considerable time before it is applicable. As long as the unique identifiers are not established an adequate traceability and labelling system will be missing.

9. Feed authorisation

The new Food and Feed Regulations bring in for the first time an approval process for GM animal feeds. It requires that GM animal feeds do not have adverse effects on animal health or the environment. No such consideration is required under the Novel Foods Regulation. New research has discovered the Bt toxin in the digestive system of pigs fed Bt11 corn which raises new safety questionsⁱⁱⁱ. The SCF notes that for Bt11 “processing by-products are used as animal feedstuffs”. Under the old rules the safety of Bt11 for use as an animal feed will not have to be assessed.

10. Dangerous precedent

The quality of this application and the supporting safety research is clearly of a poor and insufficient standard. If this sweet corn is approved using this evidence then a dangerous precedent will be set for future approvals. The public demands the highest quality of research into the safety of their food.

Real testing. Real Transparency

Friends of the Earth believes that Bt11 should be rejected until proper testing is carried out. This should use the whole plant, include chronic toxicological tests and use allergy tests that meet the FAO/WHO guidelines. The process should be transparent and open and take into consideration diverging scientific views on its safety.

ⁱ http://biosafety.ihe.be/TP/MGC_reports/Report_Bt11.pdf

ⁱⁱ Gaugitsch H, Spök A, Hofer H, Lehner P, Kienzl-Plochberger K, Valenta R (2003), Toxikologie und Allergologie von GVO-Produkten. Roten Reihe des Bundesministeriums für Gesundheit und Frauen - Sektion IV, Band /03 (German Ministry for Health and Women, Section IV).

ⁱⁱⁱ Detection of corn intrinsic and recombinant DNA fragments and Cry1Ab protein in the gastrointestinal contents of pigs fed genetically modified corn Bt11, J. Anim. Sci. 2003. 81:2546–2551

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