

NEWS RELEASE

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For immediate release



**Citizens disguised as cloned sheep call
for resignation of government ministers
over GM policy lies in Dáil picket at
11.30am on Wednesday 10 December 2003**

(Dublin, 9 Dec. 2003 • GM-free Ireland / Global Vision Consulting Ltd.)

Citizens disguised as cloned sheep will picket the entrance to the Dáil at 11.30 am tomorrow (Wednesday) in protest at the Government's policy to legalise genetically modified (GM) seeds, foods, animal feed, crops and livestock in Ireland and throughout the EU.

GM-free Ireland co-ordinator Michael O'Callaghan called for the resignation of Agriculture Minister Joe Walsh and Education & Science Minister Noel Dempsey for violating their 1997 pre-election campaign promise that *"Fianna Fail will not support what amounts to the largest nutritional experiment in human history with the consumer as guinea pig... Current scientific knowledge is inadequate to protect the consumer and the environment from the unpredictable and potentially disastrous effects which may appear immediately or at any time in the future. The principle of "substantial equivalence" governing the testing and labelling of genetically modified foods requires that only known potential hazards are tested. Therefore unexpected toxins will be identified only when a unique health crisis occurs. This will be too late for the victims... The claims of the bio-tech industry are not supported by independent research or by the general scientific community... The rush to market with GM foods is unscientific, unseemly and premature. Prevention is wise because cure is impossible."*

But despite this promise—and thousands of emails sent to TDs, senators and MEPs by consumers, businesses, farmers, NGOs and religious groups opposed to the imminent GM invasion of Ireland—the Government voted in favour of legalising the first GM food and animal feed (Syngenta's controversial Bt11 maize) for EU-wide release at a regulatory meeting in Brussels yesterday. This pro-GM vote was overruled by a qualified majority of other EU countries. But had it succeeded, it would have effectively ended the EU's 5-year GM moratorium, caving in to the "Coalition Against Nature" (USA, Canada and Argentina) which are taking the EU to the WTO for refusing to authorise GM food and GMOs without labeling.

GM products seriously compromise the health and environmental security of present and future generations. Legalising GM seeds, foods, animal feed, crops and livestock in Ireland would be irreversible as there is no way to stop GMOs from spreading after their release. Conventional and organic farmers would be contaminated. Our milk, butter, beef, lamb and livestock export industries—which benefit from Ireland's famous green image as one of the 3 least polluted countries in the world—would fall because EU consumers don't want GM food. Conventional and organic farmers could be ruined, and no insurance company will cover GM-related losses.

This Government's must stop lying and put the well-being its citizens and the environment before the business interests of the US Government and the biotech industry. Instead of legalising GM farming, Ireland should leverage its green image and use its legal rights under the Biosafety Protocol and the EU GMO Directive to declare Ireland permanently GM-free.

At the recent **European NGO Network on Genetic Engineering** (GENET) Conference in Vienna (Nov. 2003), GM-free Ireland called “for the formation of a world panel of eminent scientists to refute the biotech lobby's pseudo-scientific claims that GMOs are safe.” Michael O’Callaghan 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 a new agenda and end this GM nonsense which is giving science a bad name. Rather than caving in to 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 of widespread consumer rejection of 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 GM-free Guinness!

GM-free Ireland calls for the Government to:

- Demand the resignation of the two ministers who broke their anti-GM campaign promise;
- Oppose all legalisation of GM seeds, food, animal feed, crops and livestock in Ireland and EU;
- Provide administrative support for Irish County Councils, National Parks, municipalities, farms and other local areas which want to remain GM-free;
- Ensure representation of consumers, environmental groups and NGOs in the Food Safety Authority of Ireland and EPA committees which decide GM policy, and review the outdated science on which the latter’s claims of GM safety are based;
- Leverage Ireland’s world famous green image and invoke the Biosafety Protocol to declare the Republic a GM-free zone: this would enhance the food and environmental security of all EU member states. Ireland is the best candidate because we are: (i) geographically isolated and surrounded by water, (ii) upstream from most transboundary wind-borne GM pollen contamination as 80% of our wind blows from the Atlantic, and (iii) we have the lowest previous GM exposure in the EU;
- Collaborate with the North of Ireland to extend GM-free status to the whole island of Ireland.

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