

# NEWS RELEASE

**Dublin, Thursday 25 April 2006 • GM-free Ireland Network**  
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## GMO POTATOES NOT WANTED IN Co. MEATH

**EPA likely to approve experiment in weeks ahead**  
**Contaminated farmers would lose ownership of their crops**  
**Call for Co. Meath to declare itself a GMO-free zone**

In the global controversy over corporate control of agricultural seeds, crops and food, an emergency community meeting was held Tuesday night at the tiny village of Summerhill, Co. Meath. The village is next door to the site of a proposed five year experiment with 450,000 patented genetically modified (GMO) potatoes. The stated purpose is to test the GMO spuds, which have been modified with DNA from viruses, bacteria and a Mexican wild potato relative to make them more blight resistant – even though varieties of blight-resistant spuds are already available in Ireland.

The local community is worried about the fact that farmers who become contaminated by the patented potatoes may lose ownership of their crops [1].

They are also worried about the scientific evidence of health and environmental risks [2], the impact on property values, and a threatened boycott of Irish potatoes if the experiment goes ahead. A single gust of wind or insect carrying pollen from the GMO spuds is all it takes to open the pandora's box of nationwide contamination that would be impossible to reverse for thousands of years to come.

BASF Plant Science GmbH, a subsidiary of the world's largest chemicals company BASF [3] notified the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on 13 January of its intention to conduct the open-air experiment on a farm at Arodstown, next to the Teagasc Grange Research Centre in Summerhill. Teagasc denies it owns the land. The EPA refused to reveal the exact location of the site, but a source at the Meath Chronicle said the land belongs to Nicholas McCabe, a 74-year old retired Fianna Fáil Councillor from Co. Louth.

BASF wants to run the experiment from May 2006 to October 2010. Under the EC's "positive but precautionary" rules for GMO field trials, the EPA has 28 days to approve or reject the application; failure to do so provides the applicant with an automatic go ahead. But Kathryn Marsh, a member of the EPA's GMO Advisory Committee who spoke at the meeting on Tuesday, said the BASF notification was so incompetently written that the EPA has already stopped the clock five times to request more information from BASF [4]. The current deadline for the EPA's decision is 12 May.

The GM-free Ireland Network [5], which hosted the meeting, screened the first half of a documentary film called "The Future of Food" [6] as part of its national campaign to inform local communities about the risks of GMO seeds and crops. Over 5,000 citizens have signed a petition requesting the Government to join other EU countries with a blanket ban on GM seeds and crops. The petition can be signed online at <http://www.gmfreeireland.org>

The release of transgenic crops is fraught with well documented health and environmental problems, crop failures, contamination, biotech industry lies, bribery, suppression of evidence, government cover-ups, the lack of any long-term health studies, insurance companies' refusal to cover disaster risks, product recalls, patent infringement and cross-contamination lawsuits, biopiracy, widespread consumer rejection, national and local laws banning their release around the world, lack of democracy, and a major WTO trade dispute filed against the European Union by the Governments of the USA, Canada and Argentina, which claim that the EU's reluctance to open our market to GMO seeds and crops and foods violates the WTO's "free trade agreement."

**Contaminated farmers would lose ownership of their crops**

The Irish Patent Office confirmed that under the WTO Trade-related Intellectual Property Rights agreement (TRIPS) as well as European and Irish law, any farmer contaminated by GMOs may lose ownership of his seeds and crops, and face the prospect of annual patent royalties or patent infringement lawsuits. [7]

Speaking at the meeting on Tuesday, Michael O'Callaghan of GM-free Ireland said "This appropriation of our natural capital would be the biggest rip-off in the history of the State – a catastrophe for farmers, and the death blow to Bord Bia's branding of this country as *Ireland - the food island*."

Local farmers who attended the meeting at Summerhill expressed concern about the economic impacts of GMO contamination on the future of Irish farming.

Jim Cosgrave, a drystock and tillage farmer from Enfield said that Irish farmers who become contaminated with GM potatoes or GM superweeds would not only face patent issues, but would also face mandatory GM labeling, loss of market share, and a significant drop in the property value of their land. "No farmer would want to buy or rent contaminated farmland. Who will compensate us for our losses?"

### **EPA likely to approve the experiment**

Kathryn Marsh of the EPA's GMO Advisory Committee said that despite the fact that the EPA received 96 submissions from the general public, of which all but one strongly oppose the experiment, it is likely to give the go ahead in a matter of weeks. "Most of its members have an interest in furthering biotechnology and GMOs" she said. "They are all either university scientists with their research funded by the biotechnology companies, or they are actually employees of biotechnology companies themselves. This is something to be borne in mind when we see that the Food Safety Authority says it's OK, the Bioethics Committee of the Royal Irish Academy says it's OK, the Inter-Departmental Committee on GMOs says it's OK. All of them are almost entirely advised by those with a financial stake in the biotechnology industry. [8]

### **Health risks**

But in two written comments to the EPA commissioned by the GM-free Ireland Network from independent scientists, Professor Joe Cummins (Emeritus Professor of Genetics, University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, Canada) advised that "the environmental release of these GMO potatoes is unwise because BASF makes specious assumptions that could lead to contamination, with toxic effects on humans and wildlife." He said there is a clear risk of cross contamination of Irish potatoes, and warned that "the people and wildlife of Ireland should not be exposed to inadequately tested genetic constructions". [9]

GMO potato expert Dr. Arpad Pusztai (a biochemist at the Norwegian Institute of Gene Ecology who discovered major health risks with GM potatoes in 2000) wrote to the EPA that "In view of all the accumulating data showing that GM potatoes of all kinds investigated to date have shown unacceptable compositional, metabolic, immunological effects and potentially toxic behaviour, it is imperative for the EPA to reject this request by BASF for the field trial of their GM potatoes until and unless they are first subjected to independent environmental and health risk assessments using a scientific protocol openly agreed and approved by independent scientists and representatives of the public and consumer groups." [10]

Dr. Elizabeth Cullen of the Irish Doctors Environmental Association said "There are serious concerns about the health effects of GM foods. There have been no published papers of possible health effects of GM foods on humans, but animal trials have given serious cause for concern. If we allow GM foods to be sold and grown in Ireland, we are guilty of betraying the interests of future generations. The Irish Doctors Environmental Association will do all in its power to stop this trial." [11]

No long term health studies prove GM foods are safe and no insurance company will provide cover for farmers who grow GM crops.

There is now overwhelming scientific evidence of deaths and disease attributable to GM products among laboratory and farm animals and in the human population. Three recent studies of the health risks of GM foods have triggered fresh demands for GM components in human food and animal feed to be banned immediately, and have led to accusations of criminal negligence aimed at the Irish and UK Governments and the European Commission.

In WTO documents made public under the Freedom of Information act, the EC admits that there are "large areas of uncertainty about the health risks posed by GM produce," and that "some issues have not yet been studied at all." The EC also admits "there simply is no way of ascertaining whether the introduction of GM products has had any other effect on human health," and "no unique, absolute, scientific cut off threshold available to decide whether a GM product is safe or not." [12]

Prof. Vyvyan Howard (medical toxio-pathologist at the University of Ulster) said: "We need to change the focus of the debate away from the limited studies that have been done to date, onto the size of the irreversible legacy that we are probably going to leave for future generations."

## **Broken promises**

In April 1997, Fianna Fáil Agriculture spokesman Joe Walsh and Environment Spokesman Noel Dempsey issued a press release stating their party's position on GMOs as follows: "We are deeply concerned about the development and sale of genetically modified organisms whether they are used in agriculture, food, or food processing. It is our position that it is premature to release genetically modified organisms into the environment or to market foods which contain any genetically modified ingredients or where genetically modified organisms have been used in the production of the food. 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. Where are the long-term studies on the effects on human health and the environment?... Fianna Fáil will not support what amounts to the largest nutritional experiment in human history with the consumer as guinea pig... The claims of the bio-tech industry are not supported by independent research or by the general scientific community... 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."

"Fianna Fáil then pledged to support "A moratorium on the release of genetically modified organisms into the environment and on the marketing of any foods which contain any genetically modified ingredient, or which was produced using any genetically modified organism." [13]

But less than a year later, following pressure from US corporate interests during Bertie Ahern's St. Patrick's day visit to the White House in 1998, Fianna Fáil suddenly reversed its policy and claimed "the area of Irish economic interest where biotechnology has greatest potential is in agriculture." [14]

"That is an outrageous lie" said Michael O'Callaghan, co-ordinator of the GM-free Ireland Network. "The Department of Agriculture's plans 'to ensure the co-existence of GM crops with conventional and organic farming' is a recipe for economic disaster, because we know from 39 countries around the world that so-called 'co-existence' of GM crops very quickly leads to widespread and irreversible contamination. [15]

## **Mandatory labeling**

Under EC law, any food containing more than 0.9% of GM ingredients must carry a GM label. But there is no market for GM labelled food in Europe, where transgenic produce is refused by 70% of consumers, by the 60 largest European food brands and food retailers. [16]

The EC admits that GM crops may cause higher costs for farmers and that GM foods have no benefits to consumers. GM crops are banned in Switzerland, Austria, Greece, Poland, as well as in most of Italy, France, Wales, the Highlands of Scotland and Cornwall. They are also banned by 175 regional governments and over 4,500 local areas in 22 EU member states because of their health, environmental and economic risks. [17]

Following a national protest against the experiment in front of the Dáil on 22 February [18], UK consumers and environmental groups have written to the Chairman of the IFA's National Potato Committee, William Monagle, threatening to boycott Irish potatoes if the EPA allows the GMO experiment to proceed in Co. Meath.

Speaking at the meeting on Tuesday, Michael O'Callaghan said the introduction of GM crops would have irreversible consequences for Irish food exports. He also pointed out that Irish beef and dairy farmers who avoid the use of GM animal feed are already securing higher prices in the European market. Kepak pays a premium for GM-free beef, and the Silver Pail dairy in Co. Cork recently signed a €2m. contract with Baskin-Robbins, the world's largest ice-cream manufacturer, to supply GM-free ice cream for their outlets across Europe. [19]

## **Genetic modification not the same as conventional breeding**

Genetic modification is qualitatively different from traditional breeding methods which only combine natural genetic material from the same or related species. Genetically modified organisms (GMOs) include viruses, bacteria, seeds, crops, trees, insects, fish, crustaceans and livestock whose natural self-organising regulatory system is distorted by the introduction of genetic code from other species. These transgenic creatures have the ability to pass on their modified genes to future generations and also contaminate other creatures of the same species, related species and unrelated species via a process known as horizontal gene transfer.

Dr. Mae-Wan Ho, a geneticist who founded the Independent Science Panel on GM [20] has warned that the process of genetic modification also disrupts and destabilises the genetic code of the recipient organisms, with unpredictable long-term consequences. As a result of the admixture of DNA from different species, GM foods normally contain novel proteins which our immune systems may not recognize. In a scenario which justifies the "Frankenfood" label, transgenic DNA from GM crops designed to produce their own pesticides has been found to survive digestion and lodge inside bacteria in the human digestive system, potentially turning the consumer into a living pesticide factory. [21]

The WTO, European Commission, European Food Safety Authority, agri-biotech companies, governments and regulatory authorities around the world have been accused of covering up the evidence of GM health risks. Scientific whistleblowers have been fired, harassed and discredited.

Independent studies of the health effects of GM foods have triggered fresh demands for GM components in human food and animal feed to be banned immediately, and have also led to accusations of criminal negligence aimed at the Irish and UK Governments and the EC [22].

Genetically modified foods are already entering our food chain. Since 2000, most non-organic Irish beef, lamb, poultry and dairy produce comes from animals whose diet includes GM ingredients without any GM label. Food containing up to 0.9% GM ingredients does not have to be labelled either. A quarter of food tested by the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) in the last five years contained genetically modified (GM) ingredients. However, consumers would not be able to choose to avoid them because the makers of these foods were not required to indicate this fact on the label

### **Lack of democracy**

Speaking at the meeting at Summerhill on Tuesday, John Brennan, who manages the Leitrim Organic Cooperative, said farmers like himself who have made the effort to look into the risks of GM crops realise that our Government policy on GMOs is being forged in a totally undemocratic way.

Political decisions to legalise GMOs are almost entirely based on industry lobbying and the WTO's scientifically preposterous claim that GM foods are "substantially equivalent" to their conventional counterparts. Safety claims by the WTO, the EC, the European Food Safety Authority and the Food Safety Authority of Ireland rest on flawed risk assessments provided to them by the agri-biotech companies. Ireland continues to play a leading role in legalising GM food and farming in the EU, has never voted against them in the EU Parliament or the Council of Ministers.

Michael O'Callaghan said the Department of Agriculture's strategy "to ensure the co-existence" of GM crops is based on a legally flawed EC Recommendation which accepts 0.9% contamination of food as standard [23]. He also said the Department of Agriculture excluded 83% of the stakeholder groups who will be materially affected by Irish GMO policy from participation in a related public consultation process. This is a breach of the Aarhus Convention on public participation in environmental decision-making, to which Ireland is a signatory.

"The government first lied about keeping Ireland GM free in 1997, and lied to us again in 2005 when it claimed it was under a legal obligation from the EC to complete the consultation process in January 2005. It then sat on the data for 12 months before publishing a pathetic policy document in mid December 2005 which can be summed up as 'contaminate first, legislate later'. Now it is lying to us again by claiming the GMO potato experiment will be good for Irish potato growers, which is the exact opposite of the truth."

### **GMO bans and GMO-free zones**

GMO seeds, crops and livestock are illegal in Austria, Greece, Poland, Switzerland, most of Italy and large areas of France, and also prohibited or restricted by 175 regional governments and by over 4,500 local authorities & smaller areas across 22 EU countries because of their health, environmental, legal and economic risks. [24]

In the UK these include 40 councils, the whole of Wales and the Highlands of Scotland.

In Ireland these include Co. Cavan, Co. Clare, Co. Fermanagh, Co. Monaghan, Co. Roscommon, together with Galway City, Clonakilty, Navan and Newry. [25]

### **Call on Meath Co. Council to declare Meath a GMO-free zone**

Michael O'Callaghan said it is clearly in the economic, health and environmental interest of Meath farmers and consumers to prevent the GMO potato experiment from going ahead. "The Minister for Agriculture and Food, Mary Coughlan, admits that most Irish farmers have no interest in GM crops" he said.

"But so long as this government continues to put the interests of transnational biotech companies before the food security of its own citizens by failing to prohibit all GMO seeds and crops, it is up to local communities and County Councils to take responsibility."

Quoting the ancient Chinese philosopher Lao Tse, he said "The best way to handle a disaster is to deal with it before it happens. We now have a very short window of opportunity -- days or weeks at the very most -- to prevent the introduction of GMO crops in Meath. Our action -- or failure to act -- will be the most important of our lifetime, because GMO crops can never be recalled after their release, and their contamination of the Irish landscape and food chain will increase for thousands of years to come. Future generations will judge us on our action or failure to act on this issue now, before it is too late."

Local farmers are formally requesting the County Council to pass a motion to

- (a) prohibit the cultivation of GMO seeds and crops in Co. Meath;
- (b) exclude Co. Council funding for the procurement of food containing GM ingredients; and
- (c) prohibit the transportation of live GMO seeds (including rape seed approve for animal feed) on roads in its jurisdiction.

Similar motions have already been passed unanimously in Counties Cavan, Clare, Monaghan, Fermanagh, and Roscommon, and by Galway City, Clonakilty, Navan and Newry.

But the Irish and UK governments follow the WTO and EC line by refusing to acknowledge their right of local authorities to decide what may be grown in their jurisdiction. This situation highlights the lack of local democracy inherent in our post colonial system of top-down centralised decision-making. Other European governments including Austria, Greece, Italy, Poland and Switzerland are standing up to the WTO and fully support the right of local areas to have the final say on GMOs.

Michael O'Callaghan has advised Meath Co. Council to join the Assembly of European Regions (AER) which is campaigning for European legislation that recognises the democratic right of local Regions and Counties to declare GMO free zones if they wish to do so. [26]

## **ENDS**

## **ATTRIBUTION**

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## **NOTES TO EDITORS:**

1. See interview with Canadian farmer Percy Schmeiser who lost ownership of his crops and faced a million dollar patent infringement from Monsanto after being contaminated by their GMO rape seed: <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/interviews/schmeiser.php>
2. There is now overwhelming scientific evidence of deaths and disease attributable to GM products among laboratory and farm animals and in the human population. Three recent studies of the health risks of GM foods have triggered fresh demands for GM components in human food and animal feed to be banned immediately, and have also led to accusations of criminal negligence aimed at the Irish and UK Governments and the European Commission. For details see <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/health>
3. BASF Plant Science GmbH is an affiliate of the world's largest chemicals & drugs corporation BASF - Badische Anilin und Soda Fabrik, whose net profit jumped by 50% to €3.007 billion on sales of €42.745 billion in 2005.

Based in Germany, BASF is a former member of the notorious IG Farben conglomerate which was the financial core of the Hitler régime. IG Farben owned the patent and was the main supplier of the cyanide-based insecticide Zyklon-B, used by Nazi Germany to murder millions of Jews in concentration camps. IG Farben built a factory at Auschwitz using 83,000 slave labourers. After the war, IG Farben split into its original companies some of which survive today as Agfa, BASF and Bayer, while Hoechst merged with the French Rhône-Poulenc Rorer to form Aventis. After the war, IG Farben co-founded the Chemagrow

Corporation to develop and test chemical warfare agents in collaboration with the U.S. Army Chemical Corps. In 1967, the IG Farben Trust entered into a joint venture with Monsanto. BASF, Bayer, Aventis and Monsanto are leading producers of GMO crops. None of the above is meant to denigrate the scientists who work at BASF today, who no doubt believe GM crops are good for humanity. The point is that the agribiotech and weapons industries are historically linked.

Bayer CropScience L.P. is currently being sued in US Federal Court along with Monsanto Co. and Delta & Pine Land Co. by 90 Texas cotton farmers who say they have suffered widespread crop losses because the companies failed to warn them of a defect in their GM cotton. The lawsuit, filed in Federal Court in Texas, seeks an injunction against what it calls a longstanding campaign of deception and asks the court to award both actual and punitive damages. One of the plaintiffs, farmer Alan Stasney, said the crop failure cost him \$250,000 in lost sales and forced him to refinance his farm.

4. All submissions received by the EPA regarding the proposed GMO potato experiment are published on the EPA web site at <http://www.epa.ie>

5. The GM-free Ireland Network (GMFI) is an association of individuals and organisations collaborating to keep the whole island of Ireland free of genetically modified (GM) animal feed, seeds, trees, crops, livestock, fish and food. GMFI has the largest number and broadest diversity of stakeholders of any Non Governmental Organisation on the island of Ireland. Its members include 100 businesses and organisations representing over 32,000 farmers, cattle exporters, foresters, food producers, food distributors and exporters, leading chefs and restaurants, NGOs, professional associations, doctors, economists, lawyers, journalists, students, and consumers. For details see <http://www.gmfreeireland.org>

6. "The Future of Food" is being shown to local community groups around the country to build public awareness about the risks of GM food and farming. This award-winning documentary provides an in-depth look at the genetically modified foods controversy. Shot on location in the U.S., Canada and Mexico, the film examines the complex web of market and political forces that are changing what we eat as huge multinational corporations seek to control the world's food system through patented GM crops which invade conventional and organic crops and require contaminated farmers to pay annual patent royalties or face patent-infringement lawsuits. The film explores alternatives to large-scale industrial agribusiness, placing organic and sustainable agriculture as solutions to the global farm crisis. Produced by Deborah Koons Garcia. 90 minutes. You can order the DVD for €30 from GM-free Ireland on (0404) 43 885, or contact us to arrange a screening, cinema release or TV broadcast in your community.

7. Confirmation given by the Patent Office to Michael O'Callaghan in early 2006.

8. Statement by Kathyn Marsh at the GM-free Ireland press conference at Buswell's Hotel, Dublin on 22 February 2006. The full transcript of the conference may be downloaded from <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/potato/GMFIpc22Feb2006.pdf>

9. Summary of submission by Prof. Joe Cummins:  
<http://www.gmfreeireland.org/potato/index.php#cummins>  
Download full paper: <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/potato/info/JoeCummins.pdf>

10. Dr. Arpad Pusztai's paper can be downloaded from <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/potato/info/ArpadPusztai.pdf>

11. Statement by Dr. Elizabeth Cullen at the GM-free Ireland press conference at Buswell's Hotel, Dublin on 22 February 2006. The full transcript of the conference may be downloaded from <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/potato/GMFIpc22Feb2006.pdf>

12. EU approves genetically modified foods despite serious concerns: new documents reveal EU Commission's double standards. Friends of the Earth Europe press release, 18 April 2006. Available at [http://www.foeurope.org/biteback/EC\\_case.htm](http://www.foeurope.org/biteback/EC_case.htm)

13. Fianna Fáil statement: <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/resources/documents/IRL/politics/FF/lies.php>

14. Fianna Fáil statement: <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/resources/documents/IRL/politics/FF/lies.php>

15. For an updated list of GM contamination incidents in 39 countries, see <http://www.gmcontaminationregister.org>

16. For details on the market for GM-free food see <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/market>

17. For info on GMO-free zones in Europe see <http://www.gmofree-europe.org>

18. The full transcript of the press conference may be downloaded from <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/potato/GMFIpc22Feb2006.pdf>

19. "Dairy in Baskin-Robbins deal", Irish Times, 24 January 2006.

20. Independent Science Panel on GM: <http://www.indsp.org>

21. See "Genetically Modified Foods Are Inherently Unsafe" by Jeffrey M. Smith [http://www.gmfreeireland.org/resources/documents/science/smith/GM\\_Unsafe.pdf](http://www.gmfreeireland.org/resources/documents/science/smith/GM_Unsafe.pdf)

Also: "Eating Genetically Modified Food is Gambling With Your Health" by Jeffrey M. Smith [http://www.gmfreeireland.org/resources/documents/science/smith/GM\\_Gambling.pdf](http://www.gmfreeireland.org/resources/documents/science/smith/GM_Gambling.pdf)

For more info, see "Seeds of Deception: Exposing Corporate and Government Lies about the Safety of Genetically Engineered Food". By Jeffrey M. Smith, with a foreword by Michael Meacher. Published by Green Books, UK, 2004: tel + 44 (0)1 803 863 260.

Website: <http://www.seeds-of-deception.com>

22. See the press release of 25 November 2005 by Dr. Brian John of GM-free Cymru (GM-free Wales) at <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/health>

23. A critique of Ireland's strategy "to ensure the coexistence" of GM crops may be found at <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/coexistence>

24. See <http://www.gmofree-europe.org>

25. Map of 1,000 GMO-free zones in Ireland: <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/map>

26. Assembly of European Regions web site <http://www.a-e-r.org>