

NEWS RELEASE

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IRELAND URGED TO PREVENT GMO DISASTER

**Contaminated farmers would lose ownership of their crops
Need to protect “Ireland — the food island”
WTO and EC slammed for collusion with corporate interests**

Delegates from America, Asia and Europe attending the Green Ireland Conference at Kilkenny Castle over the weekend warned Irish farmers that they will lose ownership of their seeds and crops if the WTO and the European Commission succeed in forcing the Irish government to allow the release of patented genetically modified varieties here.

Canadian farmer Percy Schmeiser told the conference that he faced a million dollar patent infringement lawsuit from Monsanto after his crops became contaminated by its patented GMO genes in 1996. The Supreme Court of Canada ruled that because Monsanto owns the patent on the GMO genes, Mr. Schmeiser's seeds and crops now belong to Monsanto.

Dr. Vandana Shiva, the Director of the India-based Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology, explained how the WTO's Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights agreement enables giant companies like BASF and Monsanto to secure patent rights on specific GMO genes, and then claim ownership of any farmers' crops that have been contaminated by them. "It's as if the company that created the furniture in this room got a patent on the design which then enabled it to claim ownership of Kilkenny Castle."

She said "the patenting of the world's traditional agricultural crop genes by giant agri-biotech companies is nothing less than biopiracy. It is a blatant attempt to colonise the future of the world's genetic resources."

The US film director Deborah Koons Garcia, whose film *The Future of Food* will be broadcast by RTE later this year, said US counties and states are fighting fierce legal battles against powerful biotech corporations to protect their right to ban GM seeds and crops, and have already done so in parts of California and Maine.

Dr. Stanley Ewen of the Independent Science Panel on GM said GMO genes can survive digestion, create food allergies and possibly increase the risk of cancer and other diseases. "I am very concerned that food made from Monsanto's "RoundupReady" GM crops (which are modified to survive that company's "RoundUp" weedkiller) may pose a particular threat to pregnant women and their unborn babies" he said.

Irish Food entrepreneurs Brody Sweeney (CEO of O'Briens Sandwich Bars) and Vincent Cleary (the Managing Director of Glenisk Organic Ireland) said the contamination of Irish farm produce by GM ingredients would destroy the credibility of our huge beef and dairy exports under Bord Bia's branding of *Ireland — the food island*.

Mr Sweeney said his business strategy is based on producing the highest quality Irish foods for international consumers who refuse any product which contains GM ingredients. Mr. Cleary, said his organic milk and yoghurt company would be

forced out of business if his produce contained any detectable trace of GM ingredients.

Eddie Punch, general secretary of the Irish Cattle and Sheepfarmers Association, said Ireland should capitalize on its green image and called for the whole island to be declared GM-free.

Benedikt Haerlin, who convenes the annual European Conference on GMO-free Regions, emphasized that EU member states and their regions have the legal right to protect conventional and organic farming from GM contamination, including the right to ban GM crops where this is the only reasonable way to achieve this goal. He said "there is no such thing as the right to contaminate organic and conventional crops within EU legislation".

Mr Haerlin criticized the European Commission for trying to force GM crops into the European countryside. He said the EC recently tried to establish that protection of the countryside and non-GM farmers is only legal up to the arbitrary contamination threshold of 0.9% which it set for the mandatory labeling of GMOs in food and feed.

"The EC's empowerment of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) to assess the environmental risks of GMOs is completely unacceptable. The EFSA is environmentally incompetent, does not have the capacity to conduct its own risk assessments and routinely rubberstamps flawed GMO risk assessments provided to it by the agri-biotech companies it is entrusted to regulate."

Bord Bia marketing director Muiris Kennedy said he will organize a meeting of the country's major food retailers, food producers and farming organisations to discuss the implications of GM food and farming as soon as possible.

Michael O'Callaghan, the coordinator of the GM-free Ireland Network who chaired the three-day conference said the so-called "co-existence" of GM crops with conventional and organic farming is not possible. "The best way forward is for Ireland to be declared a GMO-free zone, like Switzerland, Poland, Greece, and most of Italy, France and Austria."

The conference was hosted by the GM-free Ireland Network and An Taisce – the National Trust for Ireland. It was produced by Global Vision Consulting Ltd, and was sponsored by Glenisk Organic Ireland, the Irish Organic Farmers Association, the Irish Doctors Environmental Association and other groups.

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ATTRIBUTION

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