

NEWS RELEASE

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ILLEGAL GMO RICE ON SALE FOR YEARS

EC bans imports of US rice

Contaminated US farmers sue Bayer CropScience

FSAI urged to recall suspect rice from supermarket shelves

An illegal variety of genetically modified (GM) long-grain rice from experiments carried out by Bayer CropScience in the USA from 1998 to 2001 may have contaminated the Irish and UK food chain without detection for the past eight years. The contamination could also affect rice and processed rice products currently served in hotels and restaurants or sold by retailers, including rice flour and baby food recommended for infants in the weaning process.

The illegal GM rice, called Liberty Link (LL Rice 601) was developed by Bayer CropScience, a subsidiary of the world's largest chemicals company BASF which cancelled a proposed experiment with 450,000 GMO potatoes in Co. Meath earlier this year [1]. The patented rice is genetically modified with genes from viruses and bacteria that make it resistant to a weed killer called Liberty, which contains glufosinate ammonium, applications of which can leave toxic traces on the harvested crop. It is a neurotoxin which has been observed to cause defects in unborn mammals [2]. LL Rice 601 has not been approved for human consumption anywhere in the world

Although no GM rice of any kind is authorised for import, cultivation, or sale as food or animal feed in the European Union, member states did import 300,000 tonnes of U.S. rice in 2005, 85 percent of which is long grain husked, semi-milled and wholly-milled rice. The Irish Central Statistics Office (CSO) said yesterday that U.S. rice imports enter the country through 34 different types of products from raw rice to processed foods. Neither the CSO nor the Department of Agriculture and Food could provide a ready figure for the quantities imported from the USA, but it appears that 939 tonnes of US rice has been imported since January 2005. As of this morning, no test is yet available to identify contamination.

Bayer released the GM rice for experiments on US farms in Arkansas and Missouri between 1998 and 2001 [3]. But the company decided not to market it and never submitted it for official approval. The reasons for the decision are not known, but independent scientists suspect it could be due to the fact that many GM crops are not uniform and are genetically unstable. [4]

The GM rice contamination was first discovered in January of this year [5]. Last week, the Arkansas government said it suspects the crisis began when pollen from the rice tested on US farms spread to contaminate conventional crops. This would mean that it has been present - and presumably been exported - since 1998, when the experiments began.

Bayer waited until 31 July before reporting the problem to the US authorities.

But the Bush administration then waited a further three weeks before announcing the contamination on 18 August. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) secretary Mike Johanns said his agency withheld the information while trying to validate a test that producers, shippers and customers could use to detect the illegal GMO. According to the USDA, "each test could cost as much as \$300, but it is uncertain who would pay for the testing."

Bayer's response has been to apply to the USDA for a speedy retroactive legalisation of the banned GM rice, thereby transforming it from a contaminant to an administrative oversight [6]. This is a cynical action, since LL601 is a failed variety which has never been demonstrated to be either uniform or genetically stable. That means that the novel proteins contained within it might, between 1998 and 2006, have become scrambled in quite unpredictable ways. If the USDA connives in this retrospective deregulation, it will further discredit the US regulatory authorities which are known to have close ties with the biotech industry they are entrusted to regulate. [7]

Last week, tests revealed the contamination has spread from the original field tests in Arkansas and Missouri all the way to Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas. There are now fears that it will also be found in California, since the GM variety was tested there in 1997 and 1998 and may have contaminated short-grain rice as well as the long-grain varieties identified so far. US rice farmers, who are currently harvesting their crop, are extremely worried by the economic impact of the contamination on the estimated \$1.9 billion value of this year's US rice crop.

On Monday, rice farmers in Arkansas, Missouri, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas and California filed two class action lawsuits against Bayer CropScience for failing to prevent its illegal GMO rice from entering the food chain. The plaintiffs are seeking compensatory and punitive damages, as well as an injunction requiring Bayer to clean up the contamination from Bayer's genetically modified rice. Yesterday Bayer was hit by a further lawsuit seeking \$275,000 per plaintiff plus punitive damages. [8]

EC bans GM rice imports from USA

The EC was formally informed about the contamination incident on 18th August, and it responded four days later on 24 August by placing a ban on all future imports of American long-grain rice unless they are accompanied by export-point certification confirming that they are free of LL601 contaminants [9].

The EC said that Member States authorities are responsible for controlling the imports at their borders and for preventing any contaminated consignments from being placed on the market. In addition, they should carry out controls on products already on the market, to ensure that they are free from LL Rice 601. The EC also said that business operators importing rice from the USA also have responsibility for ensuring that LL Rice 601 does not enter the EU food chain and that imports are certified as free from this unauthorised GMO, in accordance with the EU food law principle that operators are responsible for the safety of the food or feed that they place on the market.

In contrast, the Japanese government immediately banned all US long-grain rice imports, whether or not accompanied by certification. It also instructed Japanese companies not to process or sell any U.S. long-grain rice imported in recent months. Japan is the the second largest importer of rice from the US. South Korea was also said to be considering a ban last week.

This latest case of GM contamination follows a similar incident in March last year in which the biotech company Syngenta admitted to selling an experimental and illegal GM maize variety to US farmers for four years. [10]

But this time, and despite the international outcry, the European Commission said it would only impose testing and certification requirements on imports of U.S. long grain rice. The feeble EC response has infuriated NGOs and consumer groups, since it is inevitable that rice containing LL601 is already on supermarket shelves (11).

Can the regulatory authorities be trusted?

Today, eleven days after the EC was notified and five days after it issued the ban, there has still been no official reaction to the scandal from the Irish Department of Agriculture and Food or from the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI). As of last night, the latter has issued no warning or product recall notice to the Irish food industry or to the public.

In a telephone interview on Monday, FSAI Chief Biotechnology Specialist Dr. Pat O'Mahony said that if a validation test becomes available later this week, FSAI would then require random tests of US rice at border points. He said FSAI has no plans to require comprehensive testing of rice products already on supermarket shelves, and does not plan to recall long-grain US rice products unless there is more evidence that the illegal rice does pose a health risk. Dr O'Mahony added that the illegal GM rice "has zero health risks as far as I can see".

This echoes the repeated claim by U.S. authorities and the biotech industry that GM foods pose no risk to public health or the environment, despite no long-term health studies, and growing scientific evidence of deaths and disease attributable to GM food in laboratory animals, livestock and the human population [12]. The CEO of the FSAI, Dr. John O'Brien, is a former director of a biotech industry lobby group which claims GM food is safe [13].

Speaking about Bayer's illegal GM rice last week, a European Commission official said "We do not share the view of the U.S. that there is no risk. We are still missing substantial amounts of information. The Commission is not satisfied with the information policy and this was transmitted to the Americans," he said. A secret EC document submitted to the WTO and leaked earlier this year clearly states "there is no unique, absolute, scientific cut-off threshold available to decide whether a GM product is safe or not".

Bayer claims that it has now developed a test which will identify traces of LL601 in rice samples, and that their test method has been verified by the US Agriculture Department [14]. The test method will also have to be verified at the EU's Joint Research Centre (JRC) before it is accepted for certification purposes by the EC. But according to Dr. Brian John of GM-free Wales, "That could be a very protracted process, and even when it is complete we need to bear in mind that the test method may well have been carefully designed to provide false negatives. The JRC is still not certain that the test method developed last year during the Bt10 scandal is not fraudulent, and we expect the same thing to happen this time around. We need to remember that the testing of rice samples for GM contamination is not designed to get after the truth, but to provide official reassurance. Even if the test method is sound, you can conveniently 'miss' widespread GM contamination simply by adjusting your sampling methods." [15]

It is not clear that the JRC can be trusted, since its former CEO, "Dr." Barry McSweeney, attempted to suppress the publication of the official 2005 EC report on the so-called "co-existence" of GM crops with conventional and organic farming, which found that GM food has no benefits to consumers and that GM crops would cause up to 40% higher costs for EU farmers. [16]

Even if and the JRC approves a validation test as it may do this week, it begs the question of how much illegal and/or unlabelled GM rice and other GM crops has contaminated our food chain since 1998. Most US soya, maize, oilseed rape, cotton and rice are now contaminated. But since no one is able to look into the past, nobody will ever know.

Inside sources said yesterday that the Department of Agriculture will attempt to trace recent shipments of rice for animal feed to see if they are clean. We know of no response from the Department of Health and Children.

The scandal has been reported world wide since last week [17], with the notable exception of the Irish Times, Irish Independent, and the Irish Farmers Journal, which all have close ties to the GM industry [18].

Irish response

Michael O'Callaghan, who co-ordinates the GM-free Ireland Network [19] representing 124 farm and food groups North and South of the border [20], said "This latest contamination scandal shows how easily European and Irish food are being contaminated by imports of both illegal and legal GM food and animal feed from the USA and other countries in North and South America. The fact that such contamination may have occurred for years without being discovered should be the final nail in the coffin of the unworkable EC and Irish Government plans to allow the so-called 'co-existence' of GM crops with conventional and organic farming [21]. It makes a farce of the government's claim that one can keep GM and conventional foods separate from farm to fork. He also said Ireland should follow the lead of the EU's largest agricultural producer, Poland, and implement a blanket ban on GM seeds and crops with immediate effect.

This morning, the General Secretary of the Irish Cattle and Sheepfarmers Association (22), Eddie Punch, said "Ireland cannot afford to import any of Bayer's illegal GM rice or any other GM food that could contaminate the Irish food chain and then find its way into processed food that is later exported as Irish produce. The future of Ireland's farm and food industries depends on utilising the clean green image of this island to export to the discerning consumers of Europe who clearly demand safe GM-free food." He added, "If the world's biggest chemicals company is unable to keep its GM seeds separate from conventional varieties, how can ordinary farmers be expected to do so?"

Speaking on behalf of the 200 members of Euro-Toques Ireland / the European Community of Chefs [23], Evan Doyle (co-owner of the BrookLodge Hotel & Spa and the Strawberry Tree restaurant in Macreddin, Co. Wicklow), made the following statement today: "Our members are committed to a GM-free food policy, and can not afford to sell anything contaminated with a GMO, particularly if it is illegal. GM rice is illegal in the EU. I call on the FSAI to recall all food products containing or derived from US long-grain rice from Irish wholesalers and retailers, until such time as reliable tests prove beyond doubt they are not contaminated by any GMOs." He added "Our restaurant turns over €10m a year,

but will lose its organic certification if our food supply becomes contaminated with any GM ingredients, legal or illegal. Keeping GM-free makes business sense!"

Michael O'Callaghan added "The ongoing saga elected representatives who collude with the biotech industry [24] to contaminate Irish agricultural seeds, crops and food is a clear violation of our Government's constitutional obligation to protect the health, property and food security of Irish citizens. I call on the Irish government, and on all farm, food and consumer groups to demand an immediate ban on all imports of US long grain rice, to support the recall of all US long-grain rice products from supermarket shelves, and to reject any future applications for experiments and commercial release of GM seeds and crops on the island of Ireland".

In June of this year, international participants at the Green Ireland Conference warned that our governments' collusion with the WTO and the agbiotech industry will cause massive economic losses to our food, farm and tourism sectors, and that Bord Bia's failure to address the issue has already tarnished our clean green image as *Ireland – the food island*. [25]

Richard S. Lewis, a partner and environmental legal expert with the Cohen, Milstein firm, said "Our clients feel that Bayer should have taken stricter steps when growing this genetically modified rice to prevent it from contaminating the commercial rice market. Bayer's actions have resulted in an unprecedented price drop financially impacting all rice farmers." According to the USDA, rice production in the U.S. is valued at about \$1.9 billion. The market price of U.S. rice has dropped approximately ten percent (including a 60 cent drop in US rice futures) since Bayer first announced the contamination.

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NOTES

1. BASF Plant Science GmbH gave up its plans for a controversial patented GMO potato experiment in Co. Meath in April this year, and may cancel it altogether. Bayer said it made the decision because of the conditions imposed in the provisional consent given by the Environmental Protection Agency on 8 May. These included obligations for the company to reduce the risk of cross-contamination of neighbouring farmers and wildlife, and to pay the costs of an independent monitoring of health and environmental impacts. BASF complained that such conditions had not been imposed for similar experiments in Sweden. The cancellation may also have been influenced by nationwide opposition from more than 100 farm and food industry groups, resistance by TDs from all the parties, two motions passed unanimously by Meath Co. Council, and the threat of further legal action on planning and constitutional grounds. Days later, BASF CEO Hans Kast (who also chairs the biotech lobby Europa-Bio), said that all the European countries which oppose GM food and crops should "get out of the EU"! For details see <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/potato> .

2. For effects of glufosinate ammonium see http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/reports/impacts_glufosinate_ammon.pdf#search=%22glufosinate%20ammonium%22 .

3. Since 1996, the USDA has granted at least 48 permits authorising Bayer or companies it has acquired, such as Aventis and AgrEvo, to plant over 4,000 acres of experimental GM rice in the USA. This may also have been released in Puerto Rico. According to Dr. Brian John of GM-free Wales, "Since most of the development work on Bayer's GM rice appears to have been done in California, it is highly likely that Californian medium grain rice is now contaminated with LL601 and with various other abandoned GM lines. Nobody knows how extensive this contamination is, because there is no testing. Furthermore, since no reference materials or genetic characterisations have yet been provided by Bayer for LL601 and the other redundant varieties, nobody knows what to look for or how to do the tests."

4. Genetic instability of GM plants, see <http://www.indsp.org> and <http://www.genewatch.uk>.

5. In January of this year, an export customer of Riceland Foods (a farmer-owned cooperative which is the largest marketer of rice in the USA) discovered that the illegal GM rice had contaminated food supplies in Arkansas and Missouri. Riceland said that because GM rice is not grown commercially in the US, it first assumed that some other GM crop such as maize had been mixed with the rice during storage or transportation. In May, Riceland said the company collected rice samples from several grain storage sites and found positive results for the GM contamination. Riceland said it informed Bayer, which confirmed the findings but claimed the modified rice was present at levels equivalent to 6 of every 10,000 grains.

Bayer then waited over two months until 31 July before reporting to the US authorities that the illegal GMO rice has contaminated food supplies.

US Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns waited for a further three weeks before announcing the contamination on 18 August. He claimed the GM rice poses no risk to health or the environment. US Agriculture Department officials later said the contamination was found in bins in Arkansas and Missouri that held rice from the 2005 crop, although the rice in those bins might have come from other states.

Days later, Riceland said that recent tests proved the contamination has been discovered in Arkansas, Missouri, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas. It is still unclear how the rice, which was last field-tested at experimental sites in the USA between 1998 and 2001, entered the 2005 crop. Riceland Vice President for Public Affairs Bill Reed said "We don't know where it is or isn't. We do know it's scattered and random throughout the South. But we don't know if it's limited to varieties. The USDA will determine that and we've told them they must find that out as quickly as possible and let everyone know. That's for them to discover." He said the USDA said, 'We can't tell you how long it'll take.' It depends on how they go through the discovery process.' He also said "There was input from the Securities Exchange Commission... because this was significant. They told us, 'You're not to talk about this.' In fact, we weren't even able to tell our salesmen. This is impacting every segment of the rice industry."

6. Bayer applied to the USDA to deregulate the illegal GMO rice on 22 August 2006. The application may be downloaded at:
http://www.aphis.usda.gov/brs/aphisdocs/98_32901p.pdf

According to a statement issued on 28 August by Richard Bell, the Arkansas Secretary of Agriculture "The USDA is in the process of deregulating it, which makes it eligible for commercialization. I guess the thinking is that will designate it safe for consumption. I thought that was odd. There are two other Liberty Link varieties that have been deregulated but not commercialized. And by 'commercialized' we mean going into trade. That hasn't happened because the rice industry objected to it. The question I hear most is, 'When will this end?' The other problem is not knowing what variety (the Liberty Link trait) is in. I've told farmers that if they have storage space to try and keep varieties separated. But everyone knows that by next week, we'll be in harvest in a big way. And as we don't have enough storage space, through necessity, varieties will be mixed. Almost all the tests are showing up positive. I've been through this before. A decade ago, we had a dioxin situation in soybean meal. The testing bill was certainly expensive. The people who will gain the most will be the testing laboratories and attorneys. (Farmers should) keep varieties separated as long as (they) can. That's the best advice for farmers, right now. And I know that's not much. But I just don't know what else to say."

This week, Andrew Kimbrell, executive director of the U.S. Centre for Food Safety (<http://www.centerforfoodsafety.org>) said "the USDA is out of control; its continuing failure to adequately regulate and monitor field testing of genetically engineered crops clearly puts the environment and public health at risk. The extent to which pollen or grains from these field trials have contaminated commercial rice or related weedy species such as red rice is unknown. USDA

policies do not provide for the testing of fields adjacent to field test sites to detect possible contamination with the experimental genetically engineered crop" .

7. Prior to being the US Supreme Court Judge who put George W. Bush in office, Clarence Thomas was Monsanto's lawyer. The U.S. Secretary of Agriculture (Anne Veneman) was on the Board of Directors of Monsanto's Calgene Corporation. The Secretary of Defense (Donald Rumsfeld) was on the Board of Directors of Monsanto's Searle pharmaceuticals. The U.S. Secretary of Health, Tommy Thompson, received \$50,000 in donations from Monsanto during his winning campaign for Wisconsin's governor. The two congressmen receiving the most donations from Monsanto during the last election were Larry Combest (Chairman of the House Agricultural Committee) and Attorney General John Ashcroft. For more information see http://www.newmediaexplorer.org/sepp/2003/11/30/fda_monsanto_dangerous_relations.htm .

8. Reuters, 28 August 2006: US rice farmers sue Bayer CropScience over GM rice.
Reuters, 29 August 2006: Bayer faces more lawsuits over GMO rice,
http://today.reuters.com/news/articlebusiness.aspx?type=ousiv&storyID=2006-08-29T184418Z_01_N29437472_RTRIDST_0_BUSINESSPRO-FOOD-BAYER-RICE-DC.XML&from=business

A copy of the first complaint is available upon request from James Pizzirusso at Cohen, Milstein on tel + 1 202 589-2257 or jpizzirusso@cmht.com .

9. On 22 August, EC spokeswoman Antonia Mochan said it was still unclear how EU customs officials will detect whether rice imports are contaminated or not, but that experts are working on detection methods with U.S. officials and representatives of Bayer. "We have to do what we can to make sure the rice doesn't come onto our market," she said.

On 23 August, a senior European Commission official said "The U.S. authorities were notified on July 31 — we were notified on August 18th. We are not happy with this". The EC said it still has no idea about possible volumes of LL Rice 601 that may have entered Europe, nor the countries that may have received cargoes with the strain. It said a validation test for the illegal GMO rice "would be distributed in Europe in a few days". A week later, the test is still not available.

On 24 August, the European Commission adopted an emergency decision requiring all imports of long grain rice from the USA to be certified as free from the unauthorised GMO. Only consignments of US long grain rice that have been tested by an accredited laboratory using a validated testing method and accompanied by a certificate assuring the absence of LL Rice 601, can enter the EU. The measures entered into effect immediately, and are expected to be reviewed after 6 months.

The EC said the extent to which the US supply chain has been contaminated is still unknown, which is why the Commission thought it was appropriate to proceed immediately with the adoption of emergency measures. These were approved unanimously by 22 of the 25 member states who were present at an emergency meeting in Brussels on Friday. The Commission said it will continue actively monitoring the situation and adapt the measures if necessary.

The EU Commissioner for Health and Consumer Protection, Markos Kyprianou, said "We have strict legislation in place in the EU to ensure that any GM product put on the European market has undergone a thorough authorisation procedure based on scientific assessment. There is no flexibility for unauthorised GMOs - these cannot enter the EU food and feed chain under any circumstances. The measures we have taken today will ensure that unauthorised GM rice is not inadvertently imported. EU consumers can rely on the high level of protection that our GM rules afford them."

The reality, however, is that we have probably been eating the unauthorised GM rice for years. The EC's supposedly "high level of protection" from GM contamination relies on testing and information provided by Bayer, makes no commitment to its own assessment of the extent of the contamination problem, and also imposes no penalties and costs against Bayer.

10. An illegal shipment of 2,546 tonnes of genetically modified Bt10 maize was unloaded at Greenore, Co. Louth on 26 May 2005. The Bt10 maize, manufactured by Syngenta, had been mislabelled since 2001 as a legal variety called Bt11. Bt10 maize produces its own pesticide and is prohibited world-wide because it contains an antibiotic resistance gene with threatens the health of animals and humans. The illegal product was only intercepted because the EU forced the US authorities to carry out tests at the port of departure. The fact that so many tonnes arrived in a single shipment long after the EU required the USA to terminate the practice, raises the question of how many hundred thousand tonnes of mislabelled Bt10 GM feed may have been fraudulently sold

to Irish cattle and sheep farmers - and consumed by Irish livestock and people - over the previous 4 years or more. Nobody knows how much Irish dairy, beef and lamb produce contaminated by Bt10 has been consumed, or exported under Ireland's clean green food island image between 2001 and 2005. In an attempt to cover-up the scandal, the Irish Department of Agriculture and Food issued a press release which referred to the illegal Bt10 shipment as a "sample", failing to disclose the quantity of 2,546 tonnes - enough to fill over 85 lorries, and contaminate over six million cattle and sheep. For details see <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/scandal/index.php> .

11. Commenting on the EC response, Greenpeace International spokesperson Jeremy Tager said "this is inadequate as rice is the world's most important staple food and is contained in many food products currently on EU shelves. It is time to move beyond case-by-case procedures as the GE industry has shown time and time again that it is unwilling or unable to prevent GE contamination." Greenpeace International calls on the EC to stop reacting to contamination 'accidents' and start preventing them instead. The EC should identify countries and products that are at high risk of contaminating our food supply with illegal or dangerous GE organisms and implement screening, preventative testing and, where there is no demonstrated capacity to prevent contamination, total bans.

12. No long-term health studies justify industry claims that GM food is safe. Scientific investigations of death and disease attributable to GM food in laboratory animals, livestock and the human population have led to accusations of criminal negligence and corruption of the US Food and Drug Administration, the European Food Safety Authority, the UK Food Standards Agency, and the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) - which are infiltrated by agbiotech lobbyists and routinely accept biased and pseudo-scientific risk assessments submitted by the corporations they are supposed to regulate. For details see <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/health> .

13. FSAI CEO Dr. John O'Brien is also a former member of the Board of Directors of the International Life Sciences Institute (ILSI), a biotech industry lobby group based in Washington, and of its European branch based in Paris. ILSI is funded by the biotech industry. Its objectives include promoting GM crops, GM food, and GM tobacco.

The ILSI has been widely criticised for posing as a Non Governmental Organisation in order to infiltrate and shape the food safety policies of the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). It positioned its experts and advice across the whole spectrum of these agencies' food and tobacco policy committees and international conferences. The ILSI was founded in Washington in 1978 by the Heinz Foundation, Coca-Cola, Pepsi-Cola, General Foods, Kraft (owned by Philip Morris) and Procter & Gamble. Until 1991 it was led by Alex Malaspina, vice-president of Coca-Cola. Dr Malaspina established ILSI as a non-governmental organisation "in official relations" with the WHO and secured it "specialised consultative status" with the FAO. Eileen Kennedy, global executive director of ILSI, said that the funding of its regional groups came exclusively from industry. According to The Guardian (9 January 2003), some of the strongest criticism of transnational corporate co-optation of international and governmental policy has been levelled against the ILSI for its efforts to get the WHO to downplay the links between sugar-rich junk food and childhood obesity and diabetes.

Entrusting a Director of the ILSI with Ireland's food safety is unacceptable. Until Dr. O'Brien is removed from his position as CEO of the FSAI, all the latter's past and future opinions on GM food safety must be regarded as suspect.

14. See <http://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory?id=2357926> .

15. GM-free Cymru press statement by Dr. Brian John, 26 August 2006.

16. You can download the EC's Joint Research Centre's report on "Scenarios for co-existence of genetically modified, conventional and organic crops in European Agriculture" at http://www.gmfreeireland.org/downloads/gmcrops_coexistence.pdf .

17. For current media coverage through 31 August 2006, see <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/news/index.php#rice> . After 1 September 2006, see also <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/news/2006/aug/index.php> .

18. The Irish TV and print media provide only very limited and often biased coverage of the GM controversy. There are obvious conflicts of interest.

The Chairman of the Irish Times Trust (which owns the Irish Times) is Prof. David McConnell who not only set up the Smurfit Institute of Genetics at Trinity College Dublin (which receives biotech industry funding), but is also Co-Chair of EAGLES - the European Action on Global Life Sciences

lobby group). His astonishing public denial of the existence of any evidence of GM food health risks, if often reflected in his newspaper's lack of coverage and pro-GM bias on the subject.

Ireland's former Attorney General, Dermot Gleeson, who sits on the Board of Directors of the Independent Newspaper Group, is also Chairman of the Irish Institute for Bioethics whose report "Genetically Modified Crops and Food: Threat or Opportunity for Ireland?" (published on 28 November 2005) reads like a Monsanto press release.

The Irish Farmers Journal has utterly failed in its responsibility to inform Irish farmers about the agronomic, economic and legal risks of GM farming, and has supported the myth that the Irish Farmers Association has had until recently "no position" on GM farming. The Journal operates from the Irish Farmers Organisation (IFA) headquarters in Dublin. It claims to be "the unbiased voice for progress and development on Irish farms" and "the voice of Ireland's farming industry", with a stated aim "to be the best source of Irish agricultural and rural information" and "to provide the focus for open debate on agricultural development as the best source of information for the Irish agricultural industry and the families dependent on it." The IFA is a member of COPA-COGECA (Committee of Professional Agricultural Organisations in the EU + General Confederation of Agricultural Co-operatives in the EU), the largest and most influential farming organisation in Europe. COPA-COGECA regularly lobbies the Council of Ministers, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions for EC legislation to approve GM seeds and crops and to prohibit the member states from establishing GMO-free zones. Donal Cashman (the former IFA President and Board member of the Agricultural Trust which owns the Irish Farmers Journal) is the current President of COGECA and a former Vice-President of COPA.

19. GM-free Ireland web site: <http://www.gmfreeireland.org> .

20. For organisational members of the GM free Ireland Network see <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/network/members.php> .

21. Re Irish government plans "to ensure the co-existence of GM crops with conventional and organic farming" see <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/coexistence/> .

For data on GM contamination incidents in 39 countries, see <http://www.gmcontaminationregister.org> .

In June 2006, Greenpeace published *Impossible co-existence: Seven years of GMOs have contaminated organic and conventional maize: an examination of the cases in Catalonia and Aragon*. The report shows that the EC's strategy for "co-existence" is a recipe for widespread contamination. Download: <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/coexistence/Greenpeace/impossible-coexistence.pdf> .

22. ICSA web site: <http://www.icsaireland.com> .

23. Euro-Toques Ireland web site: <http://www.eurotoquesirl.org> .

24. In 1997 the Fianna Fáil agriculture spokesman Joe Walsh TD issued a FF position paper which clearly stated the agricultural, environmental and health risks of GM food and crops and also promised that FF would never allow them to be grown in Ireland. He then became Agriculture Minister.

But only months later, Taoiseach Bertie Ahern caved in to pressure from US biotech industry lobbyists. In his bestselling book *Seeds of Deception: exposing corporate and government lies about the safety of genetically engineered food* (ISBN 1-903998-41-7), author Jeffrey M. Smith quotes journalist Bill Lambrecht describing how Washington's biotech connections came into play during a carefully orchestrated reception for Bertie Ahern at the White House on St. Patrick's Day 1998:

"His vote was needed to carry the EU's acceptance of Monsanto's GM maize. When Ahern had lunch with National Security Advisor Council Director Sandy Berger, the topic that Berger chose to focus on was on the need to get that maize vote. Again, when Ahern met Senator Bond from Missouri and several members of Congress, the issue was GM maize. According to Toby Moffett, a former congressman turned Monsanto man, 'Everywhere he went, before people said Happy St. Patrick's Day, they asked him, What about that corn vote?' The amazed Moffett said, 'I'm fifty-four years old, and I've been in a lot of coalitions in my life, but this is one of the most breathtaking I've seen.' The next day, Ireland cast its vote in favour of Monsanto's GM maize, the first time Ireland acted in favour of a GMO release. When revelations of the events in Washington were made public by Lambrecht in the St. Louis Post

Dispatch, Genetic Concern charged in a press release, 'US multinationals have more influence than the Irish electorate.'"

Following Bertie Ahern's St. Patrick's day visit to Washington, Fianna Fáil issued a new press release stating that "the area of biotechnology which holds the greatest potential for Ireland is in agriculture"! Ireland's EU voting record since then leaves no doubt about this Government's hardline pro-GM policy.

David Byrne used his political influence as EU Health and Consumer Affairs Commissioner to lift the EU's *de facto* embargo on GM food and crops prior to leaving office in 2004, to the fury of the majority of EU member states. He also attempted to establish a 0.5% threshold for the labelling of 17 varieties of GM-contaminated seeds, whereas EU Agriculture Commissioner Franz Fischler and EU Environment Commissioner wanted 0.3%, and the European Parliament, NGOs, consumer groups, farmers organisations and trade unions have appealed to the Commission to set the seeds labelling contamination threshold at the reliable detection level of 0.1%.

Tánaiste Mary Harney appointed " Dr." Barry McSweeney to the newly-created post of Ireland's first Chief Scientific Officer in July 2004. But in his previous position as Director General of the EU Joint Research Centre (www.jrc.cec.eu.int), he was accused by Greenpeace of trying to suppress the EU report on coexistence of GM and conventional crops which found that GM varieties will inevitably contaminate conventional and organic crops and cause higher production for EU farmers.

Minister of State Tim O'Malley TD at the Department of Health and Children with responsibility for Food Safety, claimed in 2004 that the scientific evidence of GM health risks does not exist!

Whilst President of the European Parliament in 2004, Pat Cox repeatedly denied the existence of any scientific evidence of GM risks to health and the environment.

25. Proceedings of the Green Ireland Conference held at Kilkenny Castle, June 2006:
<http://www.gmfreeireland.org/conference> .