

# **PRESS RELEASE**

**Dublin, Tuesday 24 October 2006 • GM-free Ireland Network**

[www.gmfreeireland.org](http://www.gmfreeireland.org)

## **Co. KILDARE BECOMES GMO-FREE ZONE**

### **Cross party support for local farmers and food producers**

DUBLIN, 24 October 2006 – Kildare became the ninth county on the island of Ireland to declare itself a GMO-free zone [1]. The decision was taken by the elected County Councillors at a meeting on Monday.

The Motion states “that this County Council takes all possible measures necessary to promote and maintain Kildare as a genetically modified crop-free zone, in order to protect the interests of farmers and to encourage development of our valuable agricultural industry”.

The motion was tabled by Mary Glennon, Independent Councillor for the Naas area, and was passed unanimously by elected representatives from all the political parties, with two abstentions (Rainsford Hendy FG and Senan Griffin FG).

Cllr. Glennon said “Kildare’s bloodstock, farm, food and tourist sectors have great economic importance and must be protected from any contamination by GM crops [2]. Our alarm bells went off when the world largest chemicals company, BASF, attempted to conduct an experiment with 450,000 GMO potatoes in Co. Meath earlier this year. We are absolutely delighted at the cross-party support for this motion to protect current and future generations of farmers and consumers from the threat of GM crops in Co. Kildare.”

BASF’s attempt to release the GMO potatoes led to massive opposition including a ban on GM crops in Co. Meath [3].

Eddie Punch, General Secretary of the Irish Cattle and Sheepfarmers Association (ICSA) said he welcomed Kildare’s GMO-free regulation as a pragmatic response to the future of conventional agriculture in the area. “If Irish farmers are to compete, the secret must be to be able to differentiate our product – to sell a different product which has specific characteristics that are attractive to the people that want them. The vast majority of EU consumers do not want to eat food containing GM ingredients. The whole island of Ireland should become a GMO-free zone, in order to supply the consumers of Europe with the GM-free product they desire.” [4]

A spokesperson from the Kildare branch of the Irish Farmers Association said the local IFA was also pleased by the motion.

Chef Olivier Pauloin-Valory, from Les Olives restaurant in Naas, said “This is a delicious decision. As a member of Euro-toques, which represents Europe’s 3,000 leading chefs, I refuse to serve any GM food to my customers. The future of the restaurant business in this country depends on keeping our food safe and free of all GM ingredients.” [5].

A survey of tourists visiting this country now underway by Fáilte Ireland found that 92 per cent of foreign visitors perceive Ireland as a “clean green” destination, 62 per cent associate Irish food products with natural and local production, and 46 per cent have negative perceptions of GM crops.

Local organic farmer Nick Cullen, from Ballysax, who suggested the motion to Kildare Co. Council, said the GMO free motion will help protect his constitutional right to earn a livelihood, because he would be forced out of business if his crops became contaminated by GM pollen if anyone was stupid enough to try growing GM crops nearby [6]. Mr. Cullen also arranged for local landowners to place GMO-free zone signs along the main access road to the recent Ryder Cup which brought thousands of foreign visitors to Kildare last month [7].

Kildare Co. Council’s decision came as EU member states voted yesterday to require mandatory testing of all rice imports from the United States for genetically modified material before allowing them to enter the EU. Illegal GM rice which escaped from open air field trials six years ago has since been found to have contaminated food supplies in 15 EU countries, Russia, Japan and the Middle East, leading to a collapse of American rice prices on the commodity markets, a virtual shut down of US rice exports to the EU, and massive economic losses for contaminated farmers and food exporters in the USA. [8]

Eight European countries have total or near total bans on GM seeds and crops and livestock, as do 175 regional governments, 3,500 local authorities and 1,000 smaller areas across 22 EU member states. These include most of Britain's Celtic fringe from the Highlands of Scotland through Wales and Cornwall. [9]

Unlike most EU countries, the Irish and UK governments still do not recognise the right of Local Authorities to prohibit GMO crops, and are poised to allow their "co-existence" with conventional and organic farming on this island following public consultations that have been described as totally undemocratic by stakeholder groups in Ireland and the UK [10]. Evidence from contamination incidents in 40 countries shows that "co-existence" inevitably leads to contamination [11]. GM crops can not be recalled after their release, and according to the official EU report on the subject, they may cause up to 40% higher production costs for EU farmers. [12] Moreover there is no market for GM-labelled food in Europe [13].

GM-free Ireland Network spokesman Michael O'Callaghan said that since our governments are failing in their duty to protect our security from the economic, health and environmental threats of GM food and farming, it is imperative for County and Town Councils North and South of the border to specifically prohibit the release of any GMO seeds, crops, trees, fish and livestock in their areas as soon as possible [14]. GM-free Ireland also advises Local Authorities to join the Assembly of European Regions to empower the latter to lobby on their behalf for a new EU Directive that recognises the democratic legal right of local areas to have the final say on whether to allow GM crops in their areas [15].

"Ireland's best economic interest is to declare the whole of this island a GMO-free zone" he said, "but since this government is in bed with the WTO and the agbiotech corporations on this issue, its up to citizens and their local elected representatives to take the lead at the County level to protect the interests of our farmers and consumers."

## **ENDS**

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## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

1. Irish GMO-free zones now include 9 counties (Cavan, Clare, Fermanagh, Kildare, Kerry, Meath, Roscommon, Monaghan, and Westmeath), 9 towns (Bantry, Bray, Derry, Galway City, Letterkenny, Navan, Newry, Mourne, & Clonakilty) and 1,000 smaller areas. See detailed national and county maps at <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/map> .

2. See proceedings of the Green Ireland Conference on branding for food, farming and tourism at <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/conference> .

3. See <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/potato> . The world's largest chemicals company BASF gave up its plans for a controversial patented GMO potato experiment in Co. Meath this year, and may cancel it altogether. BASF 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.

Days later, BASF CEO Hans Kast, who also chairs the biotech lobby Europa-Bio, announced that all the European countries which oppose GM food and crops should "get out of the EU"!

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.

4. ICSA is the first Irish conventional farmers group with a clearly defined policy to conserve Ireland's GM-free farming status. The speech by Eddie Punch at the Green Ireland Conference should be mandatory reading for all Irish farmers and food producers concerned about the competitive advantage of Ireland's green image, and the undemocratic way that farm policies are being determined by

bureaucrats in the European Commission and the World Trade Organisation. See <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/conference/trans/epunch.php>

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

6. EU and Irish laws forbid organic farmers and food producers from using any GM ingredients.

7. See "Organic farmer seeking to raise awareness of dangers of GM food", Leinster Leader, 5 October 2006.

8. Friends of the Earth Europe has published information online about all the reported rice contamination cases over the last two months: [http://www.foeeurope.org/GMOs/rice\\_contamination.htm](http://www.foeeurope.org/GMOs/rice_contamination.htm)

See also GM-free Ireland press releases for September / October 2006 at <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/press>

9. For maps and details of GMO-free zones in Europe see <http://www.gmofree-europe.org>

10. For details of Irish plans for "co-existence" of GM crops see <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/coexistence>

11. See the international GM Contamination Register at <http://www.gmcontaminationregister.org>

See also "Impossible coexistence: Seven years of GMOs have contaminated organic and conventional maize: an examination of the cases in Catalonia and Aragon". Published by Greenpeace International, 4 April 2006 (928 KB PDF file):

<http://www.gmreeireland.org/coexistence/Greenpeace/impossible-coexistence.pdf>

12. "Scenarios for co-existence of genetically modified, conventional and organic crops in European agriculture" published by the European Commission Joint Research Centre, May 2002. Download as 1 MB PDF file:

[http://www.gmfreeireland.org/downloads/gmcrops\\_coexistence.pdf](http://www.gmfreeireland.org/downloads/gmcrops_coexistence.pdf)

(Note that Ireland's Chief Scientific Officer Dr. Barry McSweeney, was accused by Greenpeace of attempting to suppress the publication of this report because of its disappointing conclusions for the biotech industry, whilst he was CEO of the Joint Research Centre.)

13. "No Market for GM-labelled Food in Europe", Greenpeace, January 2005. This detailed report shows that the EU market for GM labelled food products is virtually closed. Europe's top 30 retailers and top 30 food & drink producers have policies and non-GM commitments which reveal a massive international food industry rejection of GM ingredients. This cuts across the industry from food and drink manufacturers to retailers, and includes everything from snacks and ready meals to pet food and beer. The combined total food and drink sales of the 49 companies with a stated non-GM policy in their main market or throughout the EU (27 retailers and 22 food and drink producers) amounts to € 646 billion, more than 60% of the total € 1,069 billion European food and drink sales. Irish food companies doing business internationally need to implement a non-GM policy without delay. Download report (2MB PDF file):

<http://www.gmfreeireland.org/downloads/NoMarketForGMFood.pdf>

14. The GM-free Ireland Network recommends that GMO-free zone motions by Irish County, City and Town Councils be worded as follows:

(a) to protect the interests of landowners, farmers, food producers, consumers and future generations by prohibiting the release of GMO seeds, crops, trees, insects, crustaceans, fish, poultry and livestock in [insert name of county];

(b) to exclude Local Authority funding for the procurement of food containing GM ingredients in schools, hospitals, nursing homes, canteens etc.; and

(c) to prevent the transportation, storage, and use of live GMO seeds, crops, trees, insects, crustaceans, fish, poultry and livestock on its land, water, and airspace (including GMO seeds and crops approved only for animal feed or biofuel).

Because the Government will dismiss such motions, also ask your County, Town council or Regional Authority to join the Assembly of European Regions (<http://www.a-e-r.org>) which will lobby on your behalf for a new EC Directive that recognises the democratic right of local authorities to have the final say on whether GM crops may be grown in their area.

15. The proposed EU Directive should also include strict liability provisions for GMO contamination, and

take into account not only economic but also ecological aspects of growing GM crops. See the briefing "Time to change European policy on GMOs in agriculture" issued to the EC Commissioners on 17 March 2005 by the European Environmental Bureau (EEB), European Community of Consumer Cooperatives (EURO COOP), Friends of the Earth Europe (FOEE), Greenpeace European Unit, and the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) EU Group. Download as 924K PDF file: [http://www.gmfreeireland.org/coexistence/EU/BriefingGMOs\\_March05.pdf](http://www.gmfreeireland.org/coexistence/EU/BriefingGMOs_March05.pdf) .