



GM nation? The public debate

The Government will decide this year whether to start growing GM crops for sale in the UK. It was announced a year ago that there would be a public debate on the issue. Finally, after months of delays, **GM Nation? The public debate** has been launched, and runs from 3 June until 18 July.

Meanwhile the US is trying to force GM food down our throats. Having become impatient with the EU's moratorium on growing and importing GM crops and food, the US has filed a complaint with the World Trade Organisation. It is claiming that the moratorium is an illegal barrier to free trade.

The UK Government is keen to push ahead with commercially growing GM crops. With the extra pressure from the US, it is crucial that as many people as possible take part in this debate. Silence will be taken as compliance and may be used by the Government to justify opening the country to GM even though polls show that the majority of the public is firmly against this.

What you can do:

Before 18th July

- Visit www.gmnation.org and fill in the multiple choice feedback form online.
- Contact the Central Office of Information on 020 7261 8616 and request a paper version of the feedback form to fill out.
- There will be local meetings around the country. If you would like to take part contact the Central Office of Information on the number above and ask for your nearest meeting.

When filling out the questionnaire, make sure you use your chance to make personal comments, on question 15. Below are some suggestions of questions you may want to raise and some further information about the issue.

Ten vital questions for the GM Public Debate

1. How will consumer and farmer choice to avoid GM be achieved?
2. Will the Government increase funds to research into non-GM approaches to food and farming?
3. Why can't problems be addressed by non-GM options?

4. Who will be liable for harm to our health or to the environment?
5. Who will compensate farmers and food manufacturers if their produce is contaminated with GM?
6. How do weed killer tolerant crops fit with the Government's policy on sustainable agriculture and reducing reliance on agro chemicals, such as weed killers?
7. Can future generations reverse genetic modification?
8. Are GM plants involving bacteria, virus and animal genes ethically acceptable?
9. Who will monitor for health effects and who will pay for this?
10. Who will monitor effects on the environment and who will pay for this?

Key issues

GM and non-GM crops cannot co-exist

If GM crops are commercially grown in the UK it will lead to widespread contamination and even farmers who are not growing GM crops might have to label their crops as GM. As organic crops must not contain GM material, farmers could lose their organic status.

In September 2002 the *Sunday Times* reported that it had discovered GM material in honey from beehives two miles from the nearest GM trial site. Friends of the Earth had previously found similar evidence. Honey producers are advised to keep their hives at least six miles from the nearest GM site to avoid contamination. The cost and inconvenience of doing this falls on the beekeepers. If GM crops are commercialised across the UK, avoiding GM crops will be almost impossible.

GM crops threaten the environment

English Nature, the Government's wildlife adviser, said in February 2000 that GM crops could threaten wildlife, such as farmland birds. Researchers have found that GM crops can pass genes to related plants, making stronger weeds. This means farmers have to use more damaging weed killers.

Biotech companies are not liable for GM contamination

EU law on GM crops does not require biotech companies to pay compensation for, or clear up, damage caused by their crops. However, farmers, manufacturers and suppliers of food could be sued for the harm caused by GM food that they have grown or supplied. Insurance companies have refused to provide liability cover against damage caused by GM crops.

Long term health impacts of eating GM food are untested and unknown

The head of the Government's GM safety committee has admitted that potential hazards from GM food could have been missed. In the US there is no labelling of GM ingredients and no monitoring of the population for any health impacts. Therefore it is currently impossible to link any new health problems that may have emerged with eating GM food and impossible to prove their safety.

- GM crops produce new proteins which could cause new allergies.
- Antibiotic resistant genes are present in many GM plants. These genes could transfer to bacteria in humans and make disease causing bacteria resistant to antibiotics.

For more information see:

www.foe.co.uk/campaigns/real_food/resource/gm_free_britain/index.html#indepth

Or call our information service on 0808 800 1111