

**Friends of
the Earth**

Keeping Europe GM-free

and how to get your local authority to sign up

May 2005



Friends of the Earth inspires solutions to environmental problems, which make life better for people.

Friends of the Earth is:

- the UK's most influential national environmental campaigning organisation**
- the most extensive environmental network in the world, with almost one million supporters across five continents and over 60 national organisations worldwide**
- a unique network of campaigning local groups, working in over 200 communities throughout England, Wales and Northern Ireland**
- dependent on individuals for over 90 per cent of its income.**

To join or make a donation call us on 0800 581 051

Friends of the Earth, 26-28 Underwood Street, London N1 7JQ

Tel: 020 7490 1555 Fax: 020 7490 0881 Email: info@foe.co.uk Website: www.foe.co.uk

Friends of the Earth Limited company number 1012357

♻️ Printed on paper made from 100 per cent post-consumer waste

Introduction

The GM-free Britain campaign so far has been extremely successful – we have over 60 local authorities opposing GM food and crops in their areas across the UK. The key to the success of the campaign has been effective local campaigning. Across Europe campaigners and communities have been inspired by this success, and there is now a growing movement for GM-free areas in virtually every European country.

But there is growing pressure on the EU to adopt GM crops and food from the US and others via the World Trade Organisation (WTO) complaint¹. This has already caused the European Commission to force through new approvals for GM imports. There is no consumer demand for GM food, and increasing evidence that growing GM crops would threaten the environment, as well as consumer and farmer choice. But the biotech companies still seem determined to grow GM crops in Europe.



At present, once a GM crop is given European approval, it could theoretically be grown anywhere in the EU without any further consultation or local approval. Up to now, the GM Free Britain campaign has focussed on encouraging local authorities to use existing provisions to “go GM free”. This includes banning GM crops on council land; banning GM food in services, like school meals; and applying, under EU law (**Article 19**²), to prevent individual GM crops being grown in their area. The Article 19 approach is currently the only

legal option available to local authorities wanting to ban GM crops in their entire area, and applications have to be made to the European Commission, on a crop-by-crop basis.

Over the last year, the movement for GM-free areas has spread across Europe with a huge number of regions and local authorities wanting to protect their traditional and organic agriculture and keep their areas GM-free. There is now an opportunity for groups across Europe to unite around a common demand - a change in EU law which, if achieved, would provide strong legal backing for GM-free areas. This has led to the launch of the **GM-free areas petition**. As part of a Europe-wide movement, much more can be achieved than we thought possible when the GM-free Britain campaign was launched.



The petition is a great opportunity to re-engage with your local council and gain their support for this new initiative. Importantly, it does not undermine the GM-free Britain work local authorities and campaigners have been involved with to date, but builds upon it. Until this campaign for EU-wide legislation is successful, the Article 19 approach will still be our best legal means of keeping GM crops out of individual areas.

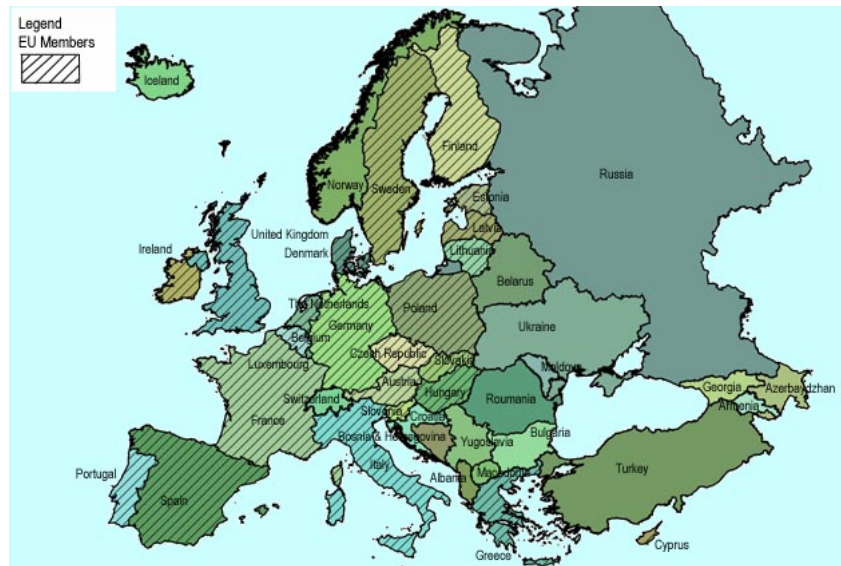
¹ The US Government, backed by other countries, filed a complaint with the WTO in May 2003 claiming that Europe’s then ‘de facto’ moratorium on GM approvals was an illegal trade barrier under WTO rules. WTO sanctions could be used to force GM food into European markets regardless of the wishes of European consumers. The ‘de facto’ moratorium was broken in 2004.

² Article 19 of the Deliberate Release Directive (2001/18/EC) is a legal tool that local authorities can use on a case-by-case basis to apply to have a condition attached to a marketing consent for a GM crop, preventing it from being grown in a specific geographical area. It can not be used to get a blanket ban on all future marketing consents for GM crops.

What is the petition all about and why is it happening now?

Current EU law is weak and offers little support for GM-free areas. The issue of 'coexistence' (between GM and non-GM crops) is a currently at a very high profile in Europe. Many member states are drawing up national coexistence legislation aiming to control contamination from GM crops. But the new Agriculture Commissioner has now started to talk about the need for **EU wide standards**. We expect the European Commission to publish its draft standards by the end of 2005.

At the same time, there is a growing movement in Europe of local governments and communities who want their areas to stay GM-free. More than **100 regions**³ and more than **3500 other areas** across Europe have now declared themselves GM-free, and there are GM-free initiatives in virtually every European country. Visit www.gmofree-europe.org to find out more.



To make these voices heard in Brussels the **GMO-free regions and areas petition to the European Commission** has been launched by a wide coalition of NGOs⁴, with the support of the **Assembly of European Regions**⁵.

The signatories to the petition will be local authorities and politicians from all over Europe. Its aim is to demonstrate political support for **EU-wide legislation** giving the democratic right to

³ Of recognised "European Region" status. In the UK, local authorities immediately below the level of central government, eg county councils, are recognised as European Regions

⁴ NGOs supporting the petition are Friends of the Earth Europe, Save Our Seeds, Global 2000 (Austria), Velt (Belgium), Natur & Progres Belgique (Belgium), Friends of the Earth Cyprus, Stenava Association (Czech Republic), People's Biosafety Association (Finland), Les Amis de la Terre (France), BUND (Germany), Greek Network Against GMOs, Greenpeace Greece, ETK (Hungary), GM-free Ireland, Coldiretti (Italy), Legambiente (Italy), Alternativa Demokratika (Malta), Milieudefensie (Netherlands), ICPPC (Poland), Quercus (Portugal), CEPA/Friends of the Earth SK (Slovak Republic), Umanotera (Slovenia), EHNE (Basque Country, Spain), Friends of the Earth England Wales & Northern Ireland, Munloch GM Vigil (Scotland)

⁵ The AER represents 250 member regions from 30 countries at a European and international level. Members in the UK are Devon, Dorset, Fife, Gloucestershire, Hampshire, Somerset, and West Sussex County Councils. See www.are-regions-europe.org/

local communities to decide whether or not GM crops are grown in their area. A petition from politicians will be more influential with the European Commission and member state governments than a public petition would be. This is a first step towards ensuring that any new EU 'coexistence' law incorporates the right of local decision-making on GM crops. We will also be pushing for any new law to be a Directive, so it would have to be voted on by the full European Parliament.

Legal backing for GM-free areas is a tough challenge, and there will be strenuous resistance from industry. To be successful we need to get regional and local authorities all over Europe to show their support for this demand and sign the petition. By asking your local council to sign the petition, you will be part of a huge movement across Europe demanding the democratic right to decide if GM crops should be grown in your area. All petitions must be handed in to us by the **30th November** to coincide with the EU review of 'coexistence' measures – so take action now!

Petition text

GMO-free regions and areas: Petition to the European Commission

Across the European Union, thousands of local and regional government authorities want to exclude the growing of genetically modified (GM) crops in their area. The reasons for taking such an initiative include:

- concerns about the many scientific uncertainties surrounding the long term safety of GM foods and the effect on the environment of growing GM crops;
- the clear difficulties of growing GM crops without contaminating traditional, conventional, and organic crops, and the economic effects this will have on the agri-food sector;
- the demands from their citizens for GM-free food and a GM-free local environment;

Current European law fails to protect these local and regional government authorities. And internationally, there is increasing pressure to force GM crops into the European Union, especially via the US-led trade dispute at the World Trade Organisation.

WE, the undersigned, believe that in order to protect our local economy, culture, environment and health of our citizens, EU law must include the democratic right of local and regional governments to decide whether GM crops can be cultivated in their given area.

We also believe that there should be no EU wide approvals for the cultivation of GMOs until these matters are resolved and that there should be strict labelling regulations for any presence of GMOs in conventional and organic seeds at the practical detection limit.

A copy of the petition is included with this guide, and you can download additional copies from www.gmofree-europe.org

The signed petitions should bear the **signature** of the Leader of the Council or relevant officer and the **stamp** of the local authority. If councillors are signing in a personal capacity this should be stated. Petitions should be returned to Kenneth Richter, Friends of the Earth, 26-28 Underwood Street, London N1 7JQ by **30th November 2005**.

What do I need to do?

Who should sign up?

1. You should initially aim to get your local council as a whole to sign the petition – this will have the biggest impact as we will be able to demonstrate that the demand is coming from democratically elected bodies on behalf of the people living in their areas. The leader of the council is the most obvious person to sign up on behalf of the council, although other councillors (eg the Chair of the Environment Committee) or officers will be able to do this as well.
2. If the council won't sign up immediately, or if it looks like it will take some time to get their agreement, ask individual councillors to sign the petition, in their personal capacity, and build up support this way. If enough councillors sign up, your council may have to rethink!
3. Once you've got your council and/or individual councillors signed up, you can also ask other politicians to sign up. The more political support we can get, the more likely it is they will be heard. Try to get your local Member of Parliament, Welsh Assembly Members, Member of the Scottish Parliament, Regional Assembly Members and Members of the European Parliament to sign up.

How can I convince my council to sign up?

How you go about getting your council to sign up will vary according to your own local situation. Check www.are-regions-europe.org/COMMUN/A15abis.html to see if your local council is part of the Assembly of European Regions (AER), this should make signing up more of a formality as the AER already supports the campaign. And if your council has already passed a GM-free resolution, it should also be relatively easy to get them on board. If your local authority has not been involved in the campaign to date, then you will probably have to spend some time educating them about these issues. We have produced a guide for local councils which explains what the petition is about and why it is important. Details of this and further resources are listed on page 10 at the end of this guide.

Some basic arguments to remember when getting your council on board:

- The commercial introduction of GM crops could have widespread social, economic and environmental impacts on your local authority
- At the moment, once a GM crop is approved in the EU and added to the Common Seed Catalogue it can be grown anywhere, without any further approval or local consultation.
- By signing the petition, you are supporting the call for local areas and communities to have a say in whether GM crops are grown in their areas or not.
- This is a unique opportunity to be part of a Europe-wide movement calling for the democratic right to choose
- The time to act is now: decisions on the law will be made soon, and this chance won't come again.

GM-free councils

If your council has already passed a GM-free resolution, they shouldn't need to pass a separate resolution in order to sign the petition, as they already have a clear position on GM. Approach your initial supportive contacts (councillors, officers or both) and give them the guide for councils. They can advise you on the best route for getting the council to sign up. It could be that the Chair of the Environment Committee (or equivalent role in your council) can sign up on behalf of the council, or it may need to go through a Committee/Council meeting for approval.



Explain that by supporting the petition, they are not going any further than their previous resolution, but if the campaign is successful it will make it much easier to achieve the aims of their first resolution and keep their area GM-free by giving them the power to decide locally.

You may also need to reassure them that the new direction of the campaign does not mean that their previous resolution was a waste of time; in fact signing the petition will build upon their previous achievements and potentially make their lives a lot easier if EU-wide legislation is passed! And of course, what they have committed to has helped inspire this movement for GM free areas in the first place.

Councils who have not yet taken action

If your council has not yet passed a GM-free resolution, they may need to pass one to approve the council signing up to the petition. But different councils work in different ways, with some needing to get things approved by full council meetings, while others devolve decision-making to Committees.

The best way to get the council on board in all these cases is through targeting individual sympathetic councillors. Give them the council's briefing and get them to sign up as individuals first. Then you can ask them to help you find the best way forward for getting the council as a whole to sign up. They will be able to advise you on how your council works and how decisions are made. Council officers (for example Environmental Officers), will also be useful in finding out this information and may also be able to put you in touch with sympathetic councillors.

To find supportive councillors, try talking to your own local ward councillors – if they support the campaign they will be a very useful contact. You can ask them for advice on attending council meetings or getting a resolution passed. Try asking if anyone else in your group knows any supportive councillors, or whether any members of your group work in the council offices and might know potential allies among council officers. Green Party councillors should also be supportive.

It will also help to do some research into your council, if you have not already done so, to familiarise yourself with the political and administrative structure. You may find the council's enquiry service a great help, as well as individual council websites, (they usually follow the format www.lincolnshire.gov.uk). You can use these services to find contact details for individual councillors, and find out if they have a current position on GM. For background information on the structures and workings of Local Authorities in England, see the briefing *A beginners guide to local authorities in England* (see *Useful Resources* on page 10 for more

details).

Getting your council to sign the petition will be easier than getting them to pass the GM free Britain campaign resolution, because it only requires them to add their voice of support to something, rather than commit to taking any action themselves. But getting them on board will open the door for you to go back and ask them to do more. For more information, see *Campaigning with local authorities – a starter pack* in the *Useful Resources* section on page 10.

Some particularly useful things to find out would include:

- Does your council support organic farming or have targets for organic farming (which would be threatened by GM crops being grown)?
- What is the political balance of your council? Is it dominated by one party, or is it split between more than one? Is it politically aligned or opposed to central government?
- Where are the most relevant areas in the political structure? Is there a cabinet member or committee with responsibility for the environment, LA21, sustainability or any other areas of interest?
- When are the most relevant council meetings held? Are these open to the public? Are other public meetings held by the council which you could attend?
- Are resolutions/motions a good way of raising issues within your council? A sympathetic councillor may be able to advise on this one.

Media coverage

Your council will be more likely to take action if they can see that this is a popular idea with local people. Getting some good media coverage with your local newspapers is an excellent way of bringing the campaign to people's attention.

Actions that use any sort of British-produced food will help to bring home what's at stake if your area doesn't remain GM-free. This will be particularly powerful if you live in a region famous for certain foods, or an area where lots of organic food production takes place.

You could invite a council member to publicly accept a hamper of locally produced food to show support for the right to choose GM-free food, or hold a GM-free picnic. And don't forget to use scarecrows, our symbol against GM contamination, as an icon for why your area should stay GM-free. For details of how to build a scarecrow, and top tips for how to use them to best effect, see the *Scarecrow Action Guide* (see *Useful Resources* on page 10 for more details).



Send a press release to local media a week in advance of any actions, and follow up with a phone call a day later. Send a follow-up press release with your own photos if no photographer attends. If someone has agreed to cover the story and a photographer turns

up, give them a call after the event to check they have all the information they need.

Getting a letter into the local papers is also a good way to highlight an issue, and in your letter you can also call on local people to contact the council to ask them to sign the petition.

Keep in touch

Don't forget to let us know how you are getting on! We'll keep you up to date on news from around the country via the monthly email list 'gm_free_britain' – send us details of your progress so we can share it with everyone. And do send us any photos of your actions for our website and newsletters so we can share your successes. Send any news, ideas or feedback to Liz Wright – email lizw@foe.co.uk, phone 0113 242 8153, or write to Friends of the Earth, 74 Kirkgate, Leeds, LS2 7DJ.



All completed petitions should be sent to Kenneth Richter, Friends of the Earth, 26-28 Underwood Street, London N1 7JQ by **30th November 2005**. You can download copies of the petition from www.gmofree-europe.org.

Sticky questions

Why should my local authority care about GM?

A lot of the arguments are covered in our report 'Now or Never' and our guide for local authorities on the petition – see *Useful Resources* on page 10 for more details. There are many areas of local government services and policy which could be affected by GM crops, including nature conservation, food policy, local economy, tourism, Local Agenda 21/sustainability strategies etc. There are also more 'moral' issues such as consumer choice and unclear liability to consider.

What would the new legislation mean for my local council? Will they still have to object to every GM crop that comes up for approval?

The GM-free areas movement will be pushing for a law that would give local areas the right to decide how their food is produced and how their environment is farmed. It would enable local communities to get involved in these decisions and allow local authorities to pass a blanket ban on all GM crops where a democratic process concludes that this is what the local community, including farmers, wants.

Will we really be able to achieve this?

As with anything, nothing can be completely certain. At this stage we are only asking local councils to pledge their support to the principle. It will take much more work to get legislation. But the more support there is from local government, the more likely it is to be achieved, so their input is really important.

My local authority has already passed a resolution – do I still need to get them to sign the petition?

Yes, as by signing the petition they will be adding their support to a Europe-wide initiative

that aims to gain support for areas which do not want GM crops. Signing the petition will not lead to any additional work for them. In fact, if the campaign is successful, their job would be much easier, as they would have the right to decide themselves whether GM crops are grown in their areas, rather than having to apply to the European Commission, for exemption under Article 19, which may or may not be successful. And if they have already passed a resolution, it should be relatively easy to convince them to sign up.

By when do I need to get my councils' support?

The EU-wide petition will be handed in to the European Commission around the end of 2005. This coincides with various discussions it is having on coexistence including a review of national member states' coexistence measures. We are asking you to send back signed petitions by 30th November 2005 so that we can input the data and collate them ready to be handed in.

What about the UK Government's consultation on coexistence – how does that fit in?

DEFRA and the Devolved Administrations have started their consultation process on coexistence measures, as required by the European Commission. The public phase of the consultation has been repeatedly delayed and is not due to start until at least summer 2005. The Government seems happy to allow widespread GM contamination below the 0.9% labelling threshold, instead of aiming for zero contamination (or below the agreed limit of detection, currently 0.1%). The European Commission will be reviewing member states' coexistence measures, and Commissioners have already started talking about the need for EU-wide measures. We will use this opportunity to demand that local areas are given the right to decide whether GM crops are grown in their areas. And we will demand that the UK Government supports this too in our response to the UK coexistence consultation.

I'm completely new to this campaign – should I get my local authority to pass a GM-Free Britain resolution first?

No. The first thing to do is get your local authority to sign the petition – if you only do one thing, it should be this. But once you've got them to sign up, you could then go on to press for more action! It's important that local authorities commit to taking concrete steps to protect their areas from GM crops, like banning GM crops on council land, and this will add more weight to their support for the petition. Until the EU-wide campaign is successful, the steps we are asking local authorities to take in the GM-Free Britain Campaign are the only way of trying to prevent GM crops being grown in local areas.

More details of how to get your local authority to pass a GM-Free Britain resolution are available in our action guide *Campaigning with local authorities – a starter pack* (see *Useful Resources*, page 10)

Does this petition cover GM food too, or is it just about GM crops?

The petition only relates to GM crops, but if your local authority is concerned about sourcing non-GM food, the petition is still relevant, as contamination from the growing of GM crops, in their area, the rest of the UK and across Europe, would lead to more difficulty in sourcing

non-GM food. One of the points on the GM-Free Britain Campaign draft resolution for local authorities covers action councils can take to ban GM food in council services, like school meals – see *Campaigning with local authorities – a starter pack* (see *Useful Resources*, below).

Useful resources

GM-free areas – your right to decide: A guide to the GM-free areas petition – aimed at local authorities: www.foe.co.uk/resource/briefings/gmfree_areas_your_right_to.pdf

GM Free Europe website – a clickable map of GM free areas in Europe and lots of campaign information: www.gmofree-europe.org

GM-Free Britain website – www.gmfreebritain.com

Beginners guide to Local Authorities – a guide to the workings of English local authorities www.foe.co.uk/resource/briefings/local_authorities.pdf

Now or Never – detailed report including why councils should go GM-free www.foe.co.uk/resource/reports/now_never.pdf

Campaigning with local authorities – a starter pack – produced at the start of our GM-free Britain campaign, this guide is aimed at getting councils to pass resolutions based on ‘Article 19’, but it contains useful hints and tips for the current campaign too: www.foe.co.uk/resource/guides/gm_campaign_local.pdf

Selected two sided briefings covering key GM contamination issues:

Seed contamination:
www.foe.co.uk/resource/briefing_notes/seed_contamination.pdf

Food contamination:
www.foe.co.uk/resource/briefing_notes/food_contamination.pdf

Gene escape:
www.foe.co.uk/resource/briefing_notes/gene_escape.pdf

Bees, honey and GM crops:
www.foe.co.uk/resource/briefing_notes/bees_honey_and_gm_crops.pdf

Liability and insurance:
www.foe.co.uk/resource/briefing_notes/liability_and_insurance.pdf

Voluntary GM-free zones:
www.foe.co.uk/resource/briefing_notes/voluntary_gmfree_zones.pdf

The Scarecrow Action Guide – a guide to campaigning on GM contamination, including a step by step guide on how to build your own scarecrow
http://community.foe.co.uk/resource/action_guides/scarecrow_action_guide_lo_res.pdf

Contacts

Liz Wright – Food team campaign assistant – for all general enquiries email lizw@foe.co.uk or phone 0113 242 8153

Clare Oxborrow – GM campaigner – for detailed GM enquiries email clareo@foe.co.uk or phone 020 7566 1716