

GM-Free Britain

Campaigning with Local Authorities



A Starter Pack

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Introduction

Welcome to the GM-Free Britain campaign! The aim of this starter pack is to help groups all around the country generate support for a GM-Free Britain, especially within their local authority.

Some of you will have lots of experience of lobbying local government, others will have none. We've written this guide with those who don't have much experience in mind and have tried to make it as comprehensive as possible.

Take a look at sections 1 to 5 for background information and the aims of the campaign. Section 6 onwards will help you to organise a public launch, lobby your local authority and build crucial support within your local community. Good luck!

If you would like computer copy of any of the draft letters or the press release included with this pack, email Liz Wright at lizw@foe.co.uk or call 0113 242 8153.

It's intended that you'll use this guide along with a copy of *Now or never: why you should make your area GM-Free*. If you don't have a copy of this please call Publications on 020 7490 1555.

1 What is the GM-Free Britain campaign?

What do we want?

The aim of the GM-Free Britain campaign is to prevent the Government from giving the go-ahead for commercial growing of genetically modified (GM) crops, and thereby ensure that we maintain our right to eat GM-free food.

How will we do it?

We want to enlist the support of local authorities around the country, and persuade them that it is in their interests to declare themselves GM-Free. The Government will find it difficult to press ahead with commercialisation if areas and regions are saying they don't want to be part of it. The support of the community and businesses at a local level will be crucial in persuading Local Authorities to adopt a GM-Free policy.

From a freeze to GM-Free

For the last five years Friends of the Earth has been calling for a moratorium on all aspects of GM crops and food. We have been active and enthusiastic supporters of the Five Year Freeze campaign (see Appendix). So why the switch to call for a GM-Free Britain?

Over the past five years the body of evidence (scientific, economic and social) on the impact of GM crops has increased. The issues have been widely debated by such august bodies as the Royal Society, British Medical Association, Canadian Royal Society, English Nature and the European Environment Agency. None of these reports gave GM a clean bill of health but merely raised more doubts and potential problems.

Health

The head of the Government's GM safety committee has admitted that potential hazards from GM food could have been missed. Antibiotic resistance genes are put into many GM plants as markers. If these genes transfer to bacteria in the guts of animals or humans, they could transfer resistance to antibiotic drugs. Concern has now led to the gradual phasing out of crops containing these genes in Europe, but they are still used elsewhere.

Consumer rights

We have been active in monitoring pollen movements confirming current separation distances are inadequate. If GM crops are commercially grown in the UK it will lead to widespread contamination of non-GM crops. As contamination occurs, it will become more and more difficult to choose GM-free food. Current proposals for the acceptable level of seed contamination also threaten the availability of GM-free food. With proposed EU regulations allowing up to 0.7 per cent contamination of conventional seeds by GM permitted, 10,000 GM seeds per hectare of officially non-GM crop could be planted!

Liability

It is unclear who would be liable for problems arising from GM crops and food, but it seems liability won't lie with the biotech companies. Local authorities and farmers could well have to clean up GM mistakes.

Problems for farmers

The last thing UK farmers need as they struggle to survive is to have to sort out separation distances, produce crops that consumers do not want or risk being held liable when things go wrong.

There is now sufficient evidence and support to justify the step from a moratorium to a GM-Free Britain campaign. This does not rule out the possibility that some time in the future plant molecular biology may provide a way to make farming more sustainable, but we are not at that stage now.

We believe that the public, businesses and local politicians will see the sense of a GM-Free Britain and act. It is after all now or never if we want to keep the right to choose GM-Free food. The industry and Government will not take our campaign lying down, but we have the strength of our support on the ground in every corner of the country.

Why is it so crucial now?

With the end of the European Moratorium and a Government apparently besotted with GM, we look set to proceed down the path of commercialisation over the next few years or so. But it's a path of no return – GM organisms released into the environment cannot be recalled.

Farm Scale Trials

The Farm Scale Evaluations (FSE) of GM crops finished in 2003, and the results for maize, beet and spring oilseed rape were published in October 2003. The FSE indicated that GM beet and spring oilseed rape were more damaging to biodiversity than their conventional equivalents, but the GM maize was better. However, the herbicide used on conventional maize is to be banned by the EU, and no serious attempt was made to assess the yield of the crop, so it is not known whether the biodiversity gain would be acceptable in commercial farming practice.

The UK Government's policy announcement in March 2004 gave the go-ahead to the GM maize grown in the trials, but by the end of March, Bayer CropScience had announced they were shelving plans to commercialise the maize as it was "economically non-viable". The results of the winter oilseed rape are due out in 2004/05, and a further policy announcement is expected after this.

The *GM Nation?* debate

The Government announced it would hold a public debate in summer 2002, and a catalogue of errors over funding, timing and delivery followed as the debate finally took place in summer 2003. However, despite all this over 36,000 people took part in the debate, and nearly 700 public meetings took place. The results generated clearly demonstrated that there is widespread scepticism and distrust of GM in the UK. The debate process also looked at whether a 'silent majority' with different views had not taken part in the debate, but found that a broad section of the public held similar views when they learnt about the issues, and the more they learnt the more sceptical they became.

2 Local authorities: relevance and powers

Why target Local Authorities?

Despite the plans for a public debate on GM crops, there are clear indications that the Government has made the decision to press ahead with commercialisation already. Lobbying central government alone is unlikely to be productive. Instead we're asking groups to campaign locally, calling on their local authority (LA) to declare themselves GM-Free.

Even if the Government gives the go ahead for commercialisation it will find it difficult to cope with areas that don't want to grow GM crops. How can you develop a framework for growing GM crops if local authorities make it clear they want to be GM free?

By campaigning locally we also get to areas where the biotech industry can't reach!

The Local Government Association (LGA) representing around 500 LAs is a supporter of the Five Year Freeze campaign, and 45 LAs have joined individually. See the Appendix to see if yours is one of them.

Relevance to Local Authorities

Now or never sets out the reasons why LAs should be concerned about GM. There are many areas of local government services and policy that may be affected, for example:

Education:	Provision of school meals
Social Services:	Provision of meals
Food Policy:	Council may have a food policy which promotes healthy eating and locally grown and organic food.
Farm Policy:	Use of authority farmland by tenant farmers.
Nature Conservation:	Some authorities will be involved in nature conservation and may have drawn up Biodiversity Action Plans which could be threatened by GM crops.
Parks and Estates:	The choice of plants in parks and gardens
Local Economy:	Farmers' markets, organic farmers and wholefood retailers specialising in locally grown produce will be undermined if their products are seen to be contaminated by GM crops.
Tourism:	May be affected if the countryside is seen to be full of GM crops, especially if competing areas aren't.
Waste disposal:	GM material from experimental trials could be transported to local authority approved landfill sites. This is already a means of disposing of material from the farm scale trials of GM crops
Local Agenda 21/ Sustainability Strategy:	All authorities are obliged to have drawn up LA21 or sustainability strategies which will include evaluating their performance against criteria such as: improving the local economy, conserving and enhancing biodiversity and protecting the countryside.

Urban or rural?

Not all issues will be pertinent to all authorities, it will depend on which services they are responsible for providing and in particular whether they are based in urban or rural areas. Naturally, a rural

authority will be particularly interested in the potential impact on farming and is more likely to be concerned about impacts on the local economy, tourism and nature conservation.

Groups in urban areas may find it harder work to get the council to see the value of declaring themselves GM-Free. However, it is still important to get a debate going, focusing on service provision, the moral issue of consumer choice and unclear liability. Also, some urban authorities own rural land outside of their administrative boundaries — it's worth asking just in case.

What powers do local authorities have to act?

The Local Government Act (2000)

This gave local authorities a new general power:

“A local authority has the power to do anything it considers likely to achieve the promotion or improvement of the economic, or social, or environmental well-being of its area.”

Whilst the extent of this power is still to be established and there are undoubtedly constraints limiting what an authority may do, it does potentially give local authorities the ability to respond positively to a well thought out and widely supported campaign on an issue that has significant environmental, social and economic consequences - such as GM.

Service provision

The power of local authorities to decide what food is used in providing services such as school meals and social services has already been established. This has been demonstrated by the success of previous Friends of the Earth local group efforts in areas such as Leicester where, following a concerted campaign, the local authority agreed to ban GM food from the city's school meals. No local authority has been challenged over its decision to ban GM food from its services.

If there is a local authority GM-Free catering policy already, they are practically half-way there. Such a policy recognises that people don't want GM products, so surely the council should go the whole hog and declare themselves a GM-Free area!

Tenancy agreements

Local Authorities and other landlords may include a clause prohibiting the growing of GM-crops in any new tenancy agreements but cannot alter current agreements they have with their tenants. Some existing tenancy agreements may already have clauses which require the local authority's or landlord's permission before certain activities can take place on the land. These could cover some aspects of growing GM crops. However, where no clause exists the local authority/landlord cannot force the tenant to comply but can merely write to them informing them of their policy on GM crops and encouraging them to follow. A local authority wishing to exclude GM crops from its land should inform all tenants in writing as soon as it agrees the new policy, not just when tenancy agreements come up for renewal.

EU Directive

Local authorities can use a new legal tool – Article 19 of the Deliberate Release Directive (2001/18) – to help provide legal protection for GM-free areas. Article 19 can be used on a case by case basis to impose a condition to protect a specific geographical area from the marketing of a GM crop. Although it cannot be used to get a blanket ban on all future marketing consents for GM crops, it is a powerful legal tool. See the *GM-free local areas* for more details.

3 The basics

What do we want Local Authorities to do?

The aim of each local campaign is to persuade the local authority to declare itself GM-Free. We want them to:

- ensure that no GM crops are grown on land over which it has control
- adopt a GM-free policy for all goods and services for which it is responsible
- request the European Commission directly and via the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to provide legal protection for the county/district/parish for each relevant prospective marketing consent of a GM crop by exempting their geographical area in line with Article 19 of 2001/18/EC

How to persuade them?

In most areas a sustained campaign over the next 12 months or so will be required, and will involve getting local business and organisations on-side, encouraging the public to show its support and generating media coverage, as well as directly engaging with the council.

Exactly what you do will vary widely according to your own local situation. There is no right or wrong way to go about things.

Messages

Page 12 of *Now or never* outlines how GM will affect LAs. The simple, overarching messages to your councillors are:

- The commercial introduction of GM crops and foods could have widespread social, economic and environmental impacts on your local authority — get informed so you can influence the Government's debate.
- By going GM-Free local authorities can avoid the practical difficulties and drain on resources that GM crops and food could create
- You can help protect people's right to choose GM-Free food

4 Top tips for running your campaign

Remember you don't have to be an expert

It is important to be clear about why you are calling on the council to declare itself GM-Free (the facts are set out in *Now or never*) but your councillors will not expect you to be an expert on the issues or on the workings of the local council. You are acting as a concerned resident.

Find out what else is going on in your area

Are any other groups in your area working on GM already? Are any groups from the Five Year Freeze in your area? Could you team up? To find out if other groups are working on the Friends of the Earth campaign, check out www.GMFreeBritain.com or call Liz Wright on 0113 242 8153

Divide up responsibilities

This is not a campaign for one person! Perhaps someone in your group has contacts in the local business community and is keen to build links there while another begins working with your LA. Another of you may want to take on the role of media contact and another the organising of events such as the campaign launch. Just make sure everyone's clear about who's doing what.

Make a plan

Once you've found out about your LA, you'll have more idea about the best way to approach it and which of the actions outlined in this pack might be best taken and when. Map out some goals to work towards.

Meet regularly

Feedback on developments, share new ideas, and set further action points at a regular meeting. Perhaps you could set aside part of your usual group meeting for GM-Free Britain?

Keep a record of support

If local business, organisations or notables declare their support, share this at your meetings and keep a record in one place so all of your group know who's already on board. This record will be invaluable when talking to your council and the media.

Be positive

Environmental campaigners are often seen as being against everything. It's really important to propose positive alternatives, for example healthy food, organic food, local food production for local consumption, and support for the local economy. All of these provide economic, social and environmental benefits.

Remember that winning is not everything

Although getting your council to go GM-Free is desirable, a council that's reluctant to act won't invalidate the whole of your campaign. It's most important to raise the issue, generate vocal support within your community and maintain the debate.

5 Staging a public launch

To get your campaign up and running, so it sticks in the mind of a key member of the council, launch it with a publicity stunt. It will also give you the chance to tell your local media, and all those that read or listen to it, that the GM-Free campaign in your region has begun!

It doesn't matter if you don't yet know everything you want to about your local council, that can come later.

The food theme

Actions that use any sort of British-produced food will help to bring home to your audience what's at stake if your area doesn't remain GM-Free. We can choose GM-free food at the moment, but if GM crops are grown commercially, our right to choose would soon disappear.

- Do you live in a region famous for certain foods?
- Do you live in an area where lots of organic food production takes place?

We've produced resources to help you set up a stunt that's visual. They're listed in section 12 and include posters, placards, and labels for food!

Food note! Avoid selling food on the high street as there are very strict regulations about this. Also, be clear if any foods contain nuts, as some people are fatally allergic to them.

Some ideas

We know you'll have loads of ideas for your actions, but here are a couple to get started with.

Hamper presentation

Invite a council member to publicly accept a hamper of GM-free, locally produced food, to show support for the right to choose GM-free food. If you're short on locally farmed or processed produce, consider presenting home-made cakes or jams. Label up the foods with GM-Free Britain stickers and include the *Now or never* publication.

The Mayor or Council Leader would be the ideal target, but a friendly councillor should draw publicity too. The presentation will be non-confrontational so even if they do not want to make any statement of support at this stage, they may well be happy to be seen to be listening to your arguments by taking part.

The best time and place for a presentation is likely to be just before work on a Monday or Tuesday morning, outside the town hall. This timing will suit evening papers or weekly papers published on a Wednesday or Thursday. The action would require two or more group members.

GM free banquet or picnic

Set up a table or picnic blanket with local food and the GM-Free Britain visuals. Again, the key aim is to get a councillor and the local media to attend. You'll need three or more group members to help set up and take part.

Most council meetings take place in the evening so it will be difficult to do the stunt to coincide with one. If it's practical for your group, you could do the action during a week day outside the council

offices, when they are full of council employees. Seek permission to set up your stunt from the council and take along copies of *Now or never*.

This could also work as a Saturday action. You may be able to get the Mayor or a councillor to attend for 30 minutes or so but, if you can't, an unusual, visual action may well achieve media coverage without them. If the Town Hall area is quiet on a Saturday, seek permission to stage the action in a busier part of town.

Messages

Suggested over-arching messages to your council are stated in section 3. When communicating with the media (or public) it's worth bearing in mind these main points:

- Too many unanswered questions about health, consumer rights, liability and the environment still surround GM crops and food.
- Within the next two years the Government will decide whether or not to grow GM crops commercially. This will make it increasingly difficult to avoid eating GM food because contamination is inevitable.
- Your local authority can help protect your right to GM-free food — write to them today, asking them to go GM-Free.

Getting your stunt into the media

A draft press release is in the Appendix and there are more tips on getting media attention in section 9.

Send out your first press release to the local media a week in advance of the action. If your paper or radio station has an environment correspondent, they're the obvious target. Otherwise contact the newsdesk.

Follow this press release up with a phone call a day later to explain why it is a good story to cover and tell them about your photo stunt. Find out who deals with arranging for photographers, it may be the reporters themselves or the picture desk of the paper.

If the local newspaper photographers do not turn up, send in your own pictures with your follow-up press release (simply modify the original release). Find out beforehand who to send the pictures to so that they get to the right people in the newspaper office. Send in one close up shot and one of the whole action. Fill the camera frame with your image and make sure the picture conveys your message.

Take photos whether or not a photographer turns up. They'll be useful for your group publicity work and may be suitable for featuring in *Change your world* or on our website.

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.

6 Lobbying your local authority

The way councils operate differs immensely and this is by no means an exhaustive guide on how to work with them. Rather it is a collection of questions to ask and hints and ideas from which you can pick and choose, depending on your own circumstances.

Research

A crucial first step is to become familiar with the political and administrative structure of your local authority. It will inform your campaign strategy and help you to identify who you need to target. Don't be frightened to contact the enquiry service directly and ask questions. They are there to serve the public and may well be individually sympathetic and supportive of your campaign.

Council web sites are also invaluable and usually follow the format www.lincolnshire.gov.uk. From the web or enquiry service you'll also be able to find contact details for individual councillors.

For background information on the structures and workings of Local Authorities in England, see the briefing *A beginners guide to local authorities in England*.

The answer to the following questions will help inform your campaign strategy:

- Is our council already a member of the Five Year Freeze campaign? If so, it may more readily support your campaign.
- Does our council support organic farming or have targets for organic farming (which would be threatened by the commercialisation of GM)?
- Is our local authority single-tier (eg a London Borough) or two-tier (County and District Councils)?
If two-tier:
 - What is the political relationship between councils, are they politically aligned or opposed?
 - What services is each council responsible for?
 - Where should we target our efforts? *Whilst support at county level is more relevant owing to a remit for social services, education and agriculture, parish, town and district councils may be more sensitive and responsive to local opinion and should not be ignored.*
- What is the political balance of our council?
 - Is it dominated by one party, or is it split between more than one?
 - Is it politically aligned or opposed to central government?
- How is our authority structured?
 - Is there an elected mayor?
 - Is there a cabinet or a committee system?
- Where are the most relevant areas in the political structure?
 - Is there a cabinet member or committee with responsibility for the environment, schools, social services, LA21, sustainability or any other areas of interest?
- Where are the most relevant areas in the administrative structure?

- Remember that administrative officers, like civil servants, often have a lot of influence, act as advisers and are worth educating and getting on side. Target influential officers with a relevant remit.
- When are the council meetings held at which GM-Free Britain will be relevant?
 - Are these open to the public?
 - Are other public meetings held by the council which we 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.
- Are there any elections coming up?

Finding allies

The key to running a LA campaign is finding a sympathetic councillor (or two!). With a councillor on your side you will find it far easier to progress your campaign. They will also be invaluable at the early stages when you need to find out how your council operates.

- Talk to your own local ward councillors. If they support your campaign they could be an invaluable ally. You could ask their advice on attending council meetings or getting a resolution passed.
- Does anyone in your group already know any friendly or sympathetic councillors who may support the campaign?
- Does anyone in your group work in the council offices? Do they know of potential allies among council officers?
- Are there any Green Party councillors?

Top tips: how to get councillors on your side and keep them there!

- Be friendly
- Treat them with respect
- Show them you are not a crank and that you are worth listening to
- Present them with the facts
- Be reasonable but firm
- Demonstrate that it is in their interest to support your campaign.

It's worth bearing in mind that no matter how friendly and sympathetic your councillor is, it's very likely they'll need constant encouragement from you to take the matter forward – be prepared!

Remember, contacts you make now will be useful in future campaigns.

Mailing councillors and officers

Even if you find one or two friendly councillors to work with, it's worth mailing others, especially those who have a decision-making role in a relevant area such as the environment or social services.

- As a group you could send a special letter and a copy of *Now or Never* to the council leader and those councillors with key decision making powers (a sample letter is included in the Appendix).

- Send a similar letter and a copy of *Now or never* to key council officers who are responsible for advising on relevant issues.
- As individuals, your group members could send their own ward councillors a short letter explaining the campaign and asking them to show support within the council.

If you're writing to a councillor with a specific remit (eg for social services) focus on how the campaign is specifically relevant to them. Make sure it's clear who they should contact to follow-up with if they're concerned.

Email

If you have access to email, it's worth sending one to your councillor a week or two later checking they got your letter. It's quick, direct and will help draw attention to your letter in their tray of correspondence. Councillors don't have administrative support like MPs!

Council meetings: questions and statements

Raising GM in a public forum where there are a number of councillors is an effective way to generate momentum for your campaign.

Here are some general guidelines for asking a question or making a statement at a meeting of the full council, but telephone your local authority to find out more about their procedures, or chat to a friendly councillor.

Ask a question at a council meeting

Some authorities allow members of the public to ask a question of a specific councillor at the full council meeting. This is a great opportunity to get an issue on the political agenda. You could for instance ask the councillor responsible for Education:

“Will the council guarantee that every effort is made to ensure that meals provided to pupils in the authority's schools are free of genetically modified organisms.”

It is important that questions are to the point, make clear how the issue affects the duty of the authority, and where possible do not allow vague and evasive answers. This is particularly important as you will not get the opportunity to reply or to ask a supplementary question. Questions usually need to be submitted in writing one week in advance. It is well worth sending the question to local media beforehand as they usually attend full council meetings and may well be interested in the potential story. Encourage fellow GM-Free Britain supporters to attend to clap or cheer the question.

Get a sympathetic councillor to ask a question

The advantage of a councillor asking a question is that they get the opportunity to ask a supplementary question. Be aware of political sensitivity, if the question comes from an opposition councillor it may well be treated with suspicion and answered in a defensive manner.

Make a statement

If you or a councillor is not able to ask a question, enquire about making a statement. Make sure your statement shows clearly how GM is relevant to local authorities and why it is in their interests to go GM-Free. If your statement is well-received councillors may suggest you table a resolution or follow the matter up in a different way.

Take advice from a friendly councillor on how long the statement should be. Keep it short by focusing on the key arguments that affect the council directly and introduce yourself with a friendly 'hello' before you start.

Making a presentation and meeting individuals

If a group of councillors with a relevant remit is interested in hearing more, you could offer to make a presentation at one of their issue-specific committee meetings. You could also ask to meet with the executive cabinet members for the relevant policy area or even the council leader or mayor in person. Similarly you could also arrange to talk to key council officers. Present those you talk to with a copy of *Now or never*.

Getting your council to pass a resolution.

At some point in the campaign you may need to make a judgement about whether or not to proceed with trying to get the resolution passed by council. **You'll find a draft resolution in *Now or never*.**

In some councils resolutions are the most effective way to raise an issue. In others this system is largely irrelevant. Find out what the case is in your council (from someone who's on your side!), then find out what the procedure is.

You need to assess whether the resolution has sufficient political backing, particularly from the ruling party group, to get through unscathed. The least desirable outcome is that the council amends the resolution to the extent that it has no substance, yet they still claim to support the campaign.

A resolution can only be submitted by a councillor, and the more political support it has, especially from the ruling party, the better chance it has of passing through unscathed. If you can persuade the leader of the council or the executive councillor with the relevant portfolio to propose the resolution your chances of success are excellent. But once the motion is tabled you should still lobby councillors to get them to vote for it, demonstrating support amongst other local organisations and individuals.

Even if you don't think that the resolution has a chance of getting through you may still wish to ask that it be submitted as it puts the council's refusal to support the campaign in the public domain. This is a judgement you will need to make together with the councillor who has agreed to submit it on your behalf. Be aware that once a resolution is defeated there may be a minimum time period that must elapse before it can be resubmitted.

The council may be reluctant to pass the whole resolution. If you anticipate that may be the case you could consider splitting the resolution into single issues and deal with them one at a time.

Getting councillors to write to government

If the council as a whole refuses to support the campaign, ask individual councillors to express their support for your demands to the Secretary of State for DEFRA. Ask them to express their personal support for the points that are listed in the draft resolution in *Now or never*. You could make it easy for them by offering to draft the letter. A very keen councillor may be prepared to search out other councillors who are willing to be co-signatories of the letter.

The higher up they are in the Council, the more weight their letter will carry. The Government will also be more interested in what Labour councillors have to say than any others.

Local Strategic Partnerships, Overview and Scrutiny Committees and Best Value

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

If the more direct approaches outlined above are proving ineffective, you could ask the Overview and Scrutiny Committee of the council to look into the issue. Perhaps try asking them to set up a specific panel to look into the impact GM could have on the local authority.

Local Strategic Partnership (LSP)

The Local Strategic Partnership brings together representatives from the Local Health Authority, community groups and the voluntary sector as well as local businesses. The purpose of the LSP is to facilitate community involvement in council policy making and, in theory, if an LSP raises an issue the council is duty bound to listen. Some of the members may be keen to get involved with your campaign. Your council will be able to provide contact details. Write to them with a similar letter to the one you are writing to councillors. You could offer to give them a brief presentation at their next meeting if they're interested. Some LSPs are much more influential than others, but it's worth approaching them directly to find out.

Best Value (BV)

Best Value affects all council services; it places upon local authorities an obligation to continuously improve their effectiveness. Councils must prepare annual BV Performance Plans that set out the services they will provide and the indicators by which their performance will be judged. These indicators will include those set by Government plus locally relevant or voluntary ones. None of the Government indicators currently relate directly to food issues, however, find out if your council has voluntary indicators on food eg relating to local or organic food provision. Some authorities also use voluntary indicators covering biodiversity. It could be that these voluntary targets would be threatened by the commercial introduction of GM. You could also find out when your council will consult on Best Value (usually around the end of the financial year) and consider pressing for a voluntary indicator which would provide support for the GM-Free Britain campaign.

7 Building support

As you approach your local council directly, it will help your campaign enormously if you're also drumming up support amongst local businesses, organisations and celebrities. If your first approaches to the council fall on deaf ears, more of your time will need to be focused on developing and demonstrating this support.

As well as being vital to progressing your campaign, you'll be generating a ground swell of support for a GM-Free Britain that can be drawn upon to influence the Government debate on GM over the next year.

Local businesses

Here are some suggestions of local businesses or business groups you could approach for support:

- Cafes and restaurants
- Independent food stores
- Organic box schemes
- Farmers and beekeepers
- Farmers co-op schemes (eg East Anglia Food Links)
- Local Food marketing schemes (eg Somerset Food Links)
- Regional branding schemes (eg Taste of the West or Taste of Anglia)
- Guest houses and hotels
- Associations of local traders
- Chamber of commerce

Organisations

In the first instance you could look through the list of five year freeze supporters in the Appendix - if they are a member they are more likely to support the aims of the GM-Free Britain campaign. Do any of the organisations listed have groups near you? In general, groups with a broader remit and without their own specific campaign agenda are more likely to lend support to your campaign.

In the first instance you could try approaching:

- Women's Institute groups
- Wildlife Trusts
- Townswomen's Guilds
- Greenpeace groups
- Local church and community groups
- Residents' associations.

Making contact and keeping in touch

Some tips:

- To start with, list 5-10 local businesses and/or organisations that will be warm to this campaign and are relevant to target. Decide who will approach them? Work on these. Once you've given it your best shot and hopefully have a few on board, others are more likely to be supportive. Maybe the ones who've joined you will offer to help persuade others?

- Begin by sending a short, personalised letter. Stick to a handful of arguments that will interest them in particular - what impact could GM have on them, why is it in their interests to support this campaign and why now?
- Be clear on what you'd like them to do. Prepare three levels of action (see box below). If they do just one thing, what should it be? If they have more time and are interested, what else could they do? In your first approach, ask them just for their support. Once this is achieved, you could broach the idea of further actions.
- Follow up your first letter with a telephone call or visit a week or so later.
- If they are unsure, busy or would like more information, offer to arrange a time for a short informal chat. Be encouraging but keep your communications light and friendly - if they're determined not to get involved, be polite and leave them your contact details so they know they are welcome to get in touch if they change their minds.
- Try and maintain the same contact person for each group or business you approach.
- Look out for supportive individuals who are also involved with your local council!
- Creating an informal alliance with other groups who want to actively support the GM-Free Britain campaign will help you to co-ordinate action, get practical support, have wider reach and avoid duplicating effort. But, be sure to keep track of what everyone is doing and be very clear of any potential differences in your agendas from the start.

EXAMPLE ACTION LEVELS

1. As a minimum they could sign the GM-free business pledge and sign a petition, giving you proof of their support and their intention to remain GM-Free themselves. They could also display a window sticker.
2. If they would like to do more they should write to the leader of your council and copy the letter to any other key targets council you have identified. Offer to help them with this, or provide a draft letter.

Once you have their basic support, encourage them to allow you to keep them informed of progress and invite them to any future actions you arrange.

3. If they are very keen, they could write to the Secretary of State for DEFRA too.

A general draft letter to a local business has been included in the Appendix. If possible, try and focus the text more clearly on issues relevant to the type of business you are approaching. A GM-free business pledge form for local businesses to sign and display, or hand into the local council has also been included which you can photocopy. It's a good idea to keep a copy of any business sign-ups yourself so you have a record of support.

You could consider conducting a survey of local food businesses instead of taking the letter-writing approach. Perhaps begin by asking them if they already avoid GM products and finish by asking if they support the principles of your campaign. You could then follow-up any positive responses.

8 Keeping the media involved

Media work is an important element in making Friends of the Earth's GM-Free Britain campaign a success. We'll be doing our best to get the national media interested in the campaign – and related GM issues (there's a lot coming up!)

Included in this guide is a template for a press release which is written for your launch but could be modified to suit your purposes at any stage of your campaign. We've also prepared a GM-Free Britain fact sheet which you can also send out with your release.

If you feel you need basic information about doing media work, see the pull out in *Change Your World* Aug/Sept 2002 (if you don't have a copy, call Claudia Sartori on 020 7566 1677 or email claudias@foe.co.uk)

You don't have to do everything in the first few weeks. If your media are very interested in the issue you might need to think of new stories to keep the interest going. Otherwise you might want to space the stories out so as not to risk 'overkill'.

Top tip: Think about the tone of your media work. We want to persuade local authorities to work with us. It's probably best not to attack them for not being GM-Free until they've had a chance to do so.

Suggestions for media work after your launch

Here are some suggestions to try and keep the issue going. It's not an exhaustive list, and many of you will have your own ideas (it's obvious from the daily pile of local and regional press clippings we get at Underwood Street how good and imaginative so many of you are at generating media coverage).

What are your council doing?

Keep the media notified of any significant events. What is the council's response to your GM-Free call? Are they discussing it? Are they voting on it? If they are holding a meeting perhaps you could organise a photo call outside the meeting.

Council catering policy

A number of local authorities have already stipulated to caterers (for schools etc) that food must be GM-free. Has your council done this? If not, why not? Parents campaigning for GM-free food may interest the media.

Local celebrities

Do you have any local celebrities who will back the campaign? Contact them and find out. Will they give you a quote (draft a short quote for them to approve)? Would they take part in a photo call?

Politicians/parties and other influential bodies

Are there any other influential bodies that might back the campaign? What does your MP think? Perhaps local political parties can be encouraged to issue their own press release supporting the campaign. When you get local businesses and organisations on board, consider whether they are significant enough for the media to be interested, otherwise save them up and issue a press release to announce the support of several at one time.

Letters to the editor

These can also be a very good way to get your message across, especially if there is an on-going debate in the letters page. Keep your eye out for opportunities to write letters too. Try to keep your letters short and to the point.

GM survey

Perhaps you could survey public opinion in the High Street. Would the local public support a GM-Free area? You could also survey restaurants in your area. Most will probably have a policy of only sourcing non-GM food because their customers want to avoid GM ingredients. Remember, restaurants are legally obliged (with minor exceptions) to inform customers if their food contains GM ingredients.

Responding to GM issues

There are lots of things happening around the GM issue. Some of these will be national or international (for example, the Government's public 'debate' on GM crops and new EU legislation on GM labelling), some will come 'out of the blue' (such as new research or Government announcements), and some will be local issues (a GM crop being grown near your town). These all have the potential to be of interest to your local media and can provide you with the opportunity to make your GM-Free call.

9 Engaging the public

When communicating with the public, remember the three main points to bear in mind:

- Too many unanswered questions about health, consumer rights, liability and the environment still surround GM crops and food.
- Within the next two years the Government will decide whether or not to grow GM crops commercially. This will make it increasingly difficult to avoid eating GM food because contamination is inevitable.
- Your local authority can help protect your right to GM-free food — write to them today, asking them to go GM-Free.

Some ideas for action

Start a petition

Later on in your campaign you can then make an occasion out of presenting it to your council. An effective way of doing so is asking a supportive councillor to present it on your behalf at a full council meeting. The presentation will probably be made to the mayor or the council leader and it will then be passed onto the relevant executive cabinet members or committees. You could precede the presentation with a publicity stunt outside the town hall and then encourage campaign supporters to be in the public gallery whilst the presentation takes place.

Be clear on which departments you think the petition is relevant to - you could state this in an attached covering letter. If you have asked people to sign their support for all three 'asks' on growing crops, service provision, and requesting status as a GM-Free area, your petition will be relevant to several departments, but especially Education, Social Services and Farm Policy.

Stalls

Use posters and food labels to set up a crowd-enticing 'foodie' stall. Give away samples of local or home made foods to attract people's attention and get across the message that GM-free food is at risk if we go ahead with commercialisation. Ask them to sign your petition. (Once again, avoid selling food on a high street stall and be careful of any foods containing nuts).

Distribute leaflets and GM-Free stickers via organic box schemes

Approach your local organic box scheme for their support. If you get a positive response, you could ask them to include a leaflet and GM-Free sticker in one of their deliveries. Public information leaflets are available from the Information Service on 020 7490 1555.

Organise a public meeting

These are great opportunities for councillors to meet the public, something they may be particularly interested in doing if there is an election coming up. This is not a light undertaking and it's worth considering only once you've got a few councillors and local 'notables' on side. There are many possible formats, one which can be very effective is the 'Question Time' panel of councillors and experts who, after a very short presentation, take questions from the floor. Be aware of the need for a balanced panel that includes speakers both for and against GM and councillors from all the major local political parties. For more information on organising a public meeting see the pull out in *Change Your World* Feb/March 2002 or call Claudia Sartori on 020 7566 1677 or claudias@foe.co.uk for a copy. If

you would like to request a speaker from the Real Food team, call Liz Wright on 0113 242 8153 or lizw@foe.co.uk, providing at least 2 months notice.

10 Sharing information

As GM-Free Britain local campaigns get underway across the country, we want to be able to track our progress and share information between all of the groups taking part.

Which approach has worked best for you?

Have you learnt anything that other groups may benefit from knowing?

Have you got any great photos of an action you've recently done?

If you do have any developments, insights or feedback you'd like to report, please contact Liz Wright on 0113 242 8153, email lizw@foe.co.uk or mail 74 Kirkgate, Leeds, LS2 7DJ.

This information will help us to develop our national campaign strategy, and we'll be passing on some of your ideas via *Change your world* and GM-Free Britain mailings.

Resources

1. Now or never: why you should make your area GM-Free
Information booklet (A4) presents the urgent case for local decision makers to support a GM-Free Britain. The booklet provides background information but is primarily a campaign tool – for you to engage local authorities and other local influentials.
2. GM food: Like it or lump it
Public information leaflet, ideal for raising public awareness.
3. GM-Free Britain window stickers
For all campaign supporters to display!

For further copies of items 1-3 contact Publications on 020 7490 1555

4. Earthmatters #53 (Autumn 2002): GM special
A copy of our supporter magazine dedicated to GM issues
5. Technical briefings to back up information in the *Now or never* booklet
Subjects covered include: Pollen flow, Liability, Farm-scale trials, Herbicides used on GM, Seed purity, Economic impact, Feeding the world, Bayer's T25 maize.
6. Beginners guide to local authorities
7. GM-free local areas
Briefing explaining the legality of GM-free areas
8. Sticky questions
Answers to difficult questions

For further copies of items 4-8 contact Liz Wright on 0113 242 8153 or email lizw@foe.co.uk

9. GM-Free food and plate labels for publicity actions
For your campaign launch and subsequent events
10. A2 GM-Free Britain poster
For your campaign launch and subsequent events
11. Keeping your area GM free - A guide to EU decision making for Local Authorities and National Parks. Regional information and maps accompany this report, aimed at GM-free local authorities

For further copies of items 9-11 contact Clare Oxborrow on 020 7566 1716 or email clareo@foe.co.uk

**Many of these briefings, templates for materials and more are available on the internet
at**

www.GMFreeBritain.com

Contacts

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DEFRA (Margaret Beckett, Secretary of State)

Nobel House

17 Smith Square

SW1P 3JR

Five Year Freeze

www.fiveyearfreeze.org

Tel: 020 7837 0642

Local Government Association

www.lga.gov.uk

Tel: 020 7664 3131

Local Government Information Unit

www.lgiu.gov.uk

Tel: 020 7554 2800

National Association of Local Councils

www.nalc.gov.uk

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

Local regional government web site: www.local-regions.odpm.gov.uk/index.htm

Tel: 020 7944 3000