

4 November 2010



**Friends of  
the Earth**

# Briefing

## **Friends of the Earth response to Channel 4 documentary 'What the Green Movement Got Wrong'**

### **Solutions**

The documentary suggests the green movement is failing. Really? Take a look at the evidence. Our campaigning brought about the world's first climate law, a ground-breaking piece of legislation setting legal limits on emissions in the UK.

Now we've got the Climate Change Act in place, Friends of the Earth is working flat out to make emissions cuts a reality – and deliver new green jobs, warmer homes and booming green industry.

And we're helping bring about real change to people's lives. Friends of the Earth campaigned for a guarantee that people who fit solar panels get a decent return on their investment. That became law in spring 2010.

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**Friends of the Earth makes life better for people by inspiring solutions to environmental problems.**

We are:

- the UK's most influential national environmental campaigning organisation
- the world's most extensive environmental network, with around 2 million supporters across five continents and 77 national organisations worldwide
- a unique network of campaigning local groups, working in more than 230 communities throughout England, Wales and Northern Ireland
- dependent on individuals for over 90 per cent of our income.

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

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## **Friends of the Earth response to Channel 4 documentary 'What the Green Movement Got Wrong'**

### **A human face**

People are at the centre of our work. We are the biggest worldwide movement of people fighting for a safe future for everyone. We are a network of community groups in more than 70 countries around the world.

We are pushing hard for action to tackle climate change and make life better for people – for example, insulating homes that leak heat so they are easier to keep warm.

We work with communities – we don't tell them what to do. For example, we are supporting farmers and communities leading the resistance to GM crops in the developing world. And in South America, we are working with communities to halt the destruction of forests and grasslands that are vital for a stable climate.

We've got a team of lawyers who take cases on behalf of people fighting for their right to a healthy environment – often the poorest in our society.

### **Nuclear myth**

The documentary says nuclear power is the way forward and will help tackle climate change.

Friends of the Earth says nuclear power is still not necessary, still not safe and is a dangerous distraction from the new clean energy sources we urgently need to develop.

The reality is that nuclear costs billions – starving research and money for other crucial energy technologies. And it doesn't deliver. Just ask the Government: they have refused to put public money behind new nuclear power stations.

[Research](#) for Friends of the Earth shows we are already facing a bill of more than £70 billion to deal with clean-up and storage of nuclear waste from existing power stations.

The [UK Government's own research](#) shows we don't need nuclear to slash our carbon emissions. And [EU-wide research](#) shows that we can meet our targets of reducing emissions by more than 80 per cent by 2050 without nuclear power.

### **Science and technology**

Friends of the Earth is anti-nuclear but not anti-technology. We support a range of renewable power technologies. And, contrary to claims in the documentary, [recent research](#) demonstrates a mix of renewable technologies can meet our needs in a low carbon future.

We are constantly reviewing the latest scientific evidence to inform our opinions and campaigns. Thanks to our network in over 70 countries, we look at how new technologies work in the real world – for people, the environment and the economy. Our view is informed by practical concerns, not ideological ones.

## **The GM myth**

Despite more than three decades of expensive research, development and political support, GM farming has not delivered on its promise of miracle crops, higher yields or a better deal for farmers.

Experience on the ground in countries that have adopted GM farming shows:

- Farmers are losing out because they have to buy expensive patented seeds each year, instead of using ones from their previous crop
- New strains of pesticide-resistant weeds are developing rapidly
- In South America, pesticide spraying is causing serious health problems for people living near GM plantations

Some claims that GM will benefit human health are plain wrong. For example, despite 10 years of financing and development, there is no proof that GM golden rice will alleviate vitamin A deficiency and child blindness.

Vitamin A deficiency is a very real problem, but tried and tested solutions – like improving access to vegetables, fruits and brown rice – are being sidelined in favour of the pursuit of a GM miracle cure.

## **Zambia**

The documentary makes the serious allegation that Friends of the Earth urged the Zambian Government not to take GM food aid. This is not true.

Rather than being guided by western environmental groups, the Zambian Government consulted widely on GM - much like the UK. It's on record that they made up their mind based on evidence supplied by the UK Government. We supported their right to alternatives, as was agreed in an international protocol led by the UN.

## **Some uncomfortable facts about GM**

The science has moved on. Conventional farming techniques and non-GM genetic plant breeding methods are miles ahead of GM. For example, non-GM breeding techniques have brought about advances in drought tolerant crops in many African countries.

We already grow enough food to feed the world but have failed to distribute it fairly. Our [research](#) shows that we can feed a growing global population a nutritious diet without environmentally-damaging factory farms and GM crops. But achieving this will require big changes to the way food is produced and distributed – and to the political and economic forces that drive this.

There are no GM crops that are designed to increase yields. Over the past 15 years, GM crops have simply increased the need for expensive pesticides. And recent studies have concluded that yield gains over this time have come from conventional farming, not GM.

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The biggest ever scientific assessment of [agriculture](#) advised a radical shift in farming that would strengthen and benefit small-scale farming and local food systems, rather than big business and export-led agriculture.

The largest small farmers union in the world, representing millions of farmers mostly in developing countries, is demanding an end to GM farming.

GM is the exception rather than the norm in global farming. It covers less than two per cent of agricultural land and this is nearly all in industrial farming systems in North and South America with some cotton in India and China.

**Success and failures**

Friends of the Earth is out there winning campaigns, driving change – our campaign for a strong climate law brought about the world's first. We also have doorstep recycling because of our work with our supporters.

The real failure is our politicians' reluctance to act fast and decisively to tackle the threat they know we face – giant strides are needed, not small steps. We'll keep putting on the pressure in the face of a slick PR operation backed by billions of dollars from massive news corporations, industry lobbyists and vested interests.

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