

Real Food News

February 2007



**Friends of
the Earth**

GM NEWS

Northern Irish consultation launched

Northern Ireland has finally launched its GM coexistence consultation.

On the positive side, it wants a public register of sites where GM crops are grown – something DEFRA opposed for England.

But the central assumption of the proposals is the same as DEFRA's – they too plan to allow **routine and unlabelled GM contamination** of non-GM crops.

What is worse is that Northern Ireland assumes that the EU law on GM contamination of organic food will be amended to allow GM contamination. However, this is far from decided and likely to be **strongly opposed** by **consumers** and organic food companies.

Consultations in **Wales and Scotland** are due after the May elections.



Press for change

We will soon be posting a new Press for Change action at www.stopgmcontamination.org to make it easy for you to respond to the consultation.

For those of you living in England you can still urge your MP to oppose the weak rules proposed by the Government at: http://www.foe.co.uk/campaigns/real_food/press_for_change/gm_contamination_mp/index.html

Take action over illegal GM rice

As previously reported, illegal GM rice, unapproved for human consumption contaminated the food chain in 2006.



GM long grain rice from the US contaminated rice on sale in UK supermarkets and around the world on a huge scale.

The EU put in place Emergency measures to help stop contaminated rice reaching our plates.

In the UK, the Food Standards Agency is responsible for dealing with this incident. But it failed to take the action needed to stop UK consumers from being exposed to the illegal rice. Friends of the Earth has been given permission from a high court judge to **legally challenge this failure**. The hearing will be on 20 and 21 February.



Press for change

Many supermarkets have carried out their own testing and have withdrawn contaminated rice. But **we need to keep them under pressure** to make sure our food is not contaminated with illegal GM ingredients, now or in the future.

**The Real Food and Farming Campaign Team is:
Sandra Bell, Kirtana Chandrasekaran, Josh Gilbert, Vicki Hird,
Richard Hines and Clare Oxborrow**

To get in touch ring the Leeds office on 0113 242 8153, email richard.hines@foe.co.uk or write to Friends of the Earth, 74 Kirkgate, Leeds, LS2 7DJ

Take action

Please write to as many supermarkets and rice companies as you can. We've made this easy for you to do with our **new one-page action guide**, available at the link below or from Richard Hines:

http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/action_guides/rice_action_guide.pdf

Have your say on environmental liability

In the last issue we told you about the Government's Environmental Liability Consultation – we've now made it easier for you to respond.

But you need to do it soon – the official deadline has already passed but **the Government has announced that it will accept responses up to 28 February.**

Their proposals are very weak. Unless they are strengthened it is highly unlikely that the biotech company producing the organism would be expected to pay if environmental damage arose from the use of GM.

It would also fail to protect many threatened species and habitats.



Press for change

Our new email action means that you need only a minute to

respond. Visit the link below to email DEFRA or contact Richard Hines for more information.

http://www.foe.co.uk/campaigns/biodiversity/press_for_change/make_polluters_pay/index.html

You can also find more information in our briefing on the consultation. This is also available from Richard Hines or at the link below:

http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/briefings/eld_campaigner_briefing.pdf

Worry over GM threat to organics

Organic businesses recently met with MPs to highlight their concerns about the Government's coexistence proposals.

A group representing 74 organic businesses met with MPs, including Peter Ainsworth, Shadow Secretary of State for the Environment, to highlight their **grave concerns** on Government proposals on co-existence.

Opposition to GM is one of the reasons consumers choose organic, so allowing **routine contamination would devastate the industry.**

If the government allows weak co-existence that will ensure routine contamination, the cost of keeping organic food GM-free will fall on organic businesses.

During the co-existence consultation the Government met with numerous GM companies but not one organic business was consulted directly.

Organic food is also **under threat from another angle.** The UK along with other member states will soon vote on whether to allow a labelling threshold of 0.9% in organic food. We will soon let you know how to take action on this.

Austrian GM ban upheld

EU environment ministers have allowed Austria to retain its national ban on the cultivation and import of two GM maize crops.

We welcome this decision, though it is regrettable that the UK was one of only four EU members that didn't oppose the

Commission's call to overturn the ban.

In 2006 the World Trade Organisation judged that Austria had not followed the risk assessments needed under the trade-friendly WTO rules when it introduced its national GM ban. But the WTO ruling did not rule against GM bans per se.

This ruling supports the **democratic right** of every country to protect its citizens and environment.

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SUPERMARKET NEWS

Commission publish their first thoughts

In January the Competition Commission published its Emerging thinking – although inconclusive, it did recognise several potential problems related to supermarket dominance.

It has also left doors open in terms of the action it may take to curb supermarket power.

They have acknowledged that the trading practices of the biggest supermarkets may be leading to the **loss of farmers and small shops**. It has not ruled out action to protect suppliers - and has also hinted that market leader Tesco is becoming too dominant.

On Suppliers

The Commission recognised that farmers are struggling but it is still saying that it needs more evidence of specific practices to act. It looks specifically at dairy and pig farmers and concludes that dairy farmers are getting a decreasing share of the retail price of milk.

On local shops

The Commission recognised that supermarket pricing practices may be causing some local shops to close - thus reducing choice for consumers - and that suppliers may provide better service to big retailers.

But the Commission does not yet accept that there is a threat to the wholesale sector upon which local shops are reliant.

On planning

Significantly the Commission does not back the recommendations of the Barker Review of Planning which has threatened to dismantle the town centre first approach. Instead the Commission says that the 'needs test' "does not represent a constraint on the construction of larger supermarkets" noting that a significant number of large stores have been built over the last six years.

The Commission acknowledges that supermarkets may be using certain tactics in the planning system to gain advantage over rivals but does not accept that this is widespread. Friends of the Earth believes that the use of these tactics is common.

On takeovers/expansion

The Commission continues to downplay the importance of market share but it does indicate that it will be looking more closely at Tesco's dominance saying that it would be concerned if any one retailer became "entrenched and incontestable by others".

The Competition Commission now aim to publish their initial findings in June.

New report to highlight threats to planning

Our new report will show how recommended reforms to the planning system would play into the hands of the big supermarkets at the expense of local shops and town centres.

The reforms, suggested by the Barker Review in December 2006 are likely to be included in a Planning White Paper in March.

Our study will be a follow up to last year's "Calling the Shots" report. It will also show how supermarkets continue to manipulate the planning system – confirming that **planning rules need strengthening not weakening**.

Barker has suggested that big businesses including supermarkets should be given a greater say in the planning system. But our new report uses case studies to show that supermarket chains already have a huge influence over the type of development that takes place.

The report shows that the suggested **reforms would be detrimental to the Government's 'town centre first' policy**.

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Barker suggests removing the “needs test” from Planning Policy national planning guidance on retail. The “needs test” is part of a package of checks that councils have to fulfil before they can allow development to take place outside town centres. It says that an application cannot be approved outside the town centre if there is not enough need for the additional retail floorspace.

The report shows that removing this test would make it harder for local authorities to restrict out-of-town development. This would **further damage town centres**. It would also make it easier for supermarkets to build large out-of-town developments, encouraging unsustainable development patterns and increased car use.

Friends of the Earth surveyed planning officers from all the English local planning authorities. 95% of those responding said that they thought the needs test was important - 86% said they thought it was “very important”.

- 81% agreed that the absence of a needs test would make it more difficult for them to focus new development in town centres.
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The local authority planning officers expressed a number of concerns about the impact these reforms might have on town centres.

A planning officer from North Devon District Council said that *“if there is no need for an out of town development, it will compete with and undermine the vitality and viability of the town centre, increasing the need to travel by cars.”* A planning officer from a local authority in Cumbria said that the removal of the needs test would *“be contrary to the sustainability agenda upon which most policy is based.”*

To take action on the Barker report visit the Planning Disaster website:

http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/local/planning/planning_disaster/

Supermarkets public forum – last chance for tickets

This is your last chance to book your tickets for the Supersized Supermarkets public forum in London on 28 February.



Come along to this event to find out more about the **devastating impact of supermarket power**, and how we can fight back. Our panel of experts includes Hugh Fearney Whittingstall, Rosie Boycott, our very own Tony Juniper, as well as workers and campaigners from Costa Rica, the USA, and the UK.

The event is being held at the Emmanuel Centre in London from 7:00 – 8:30pm with doors opening at 6:30. It’s free to attend but you need to book your place in advance.

To do so please contact amorser@waronwant.org as soon as possible because **places are limited**.

Tesco recognise climate change

The supermarket giant has acknowledged the threat posed by climate change and the urgent need to tackle it.

But their announcement does not make Tesco a ‘green’ grocer. We do however welcome their step forward in cutting the stores carbon footprint.

Unfortunately their continued expansion plans including huge out of town stores that will lead to more car dependent shopping which contradicts these green commitments. And their continuing lowering of prices makes it harder for farmers to invest in higher environmental standards.

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Ultimately we need more Government action to ensure that Britain makes substantial and urgent cuts in carbon dioxide emissions. This is why the Governments law on climate change must include a commitment to cutting the UK's carbon emissions by at least 3 per cent annually, as called for by The Big Ask, Friends of the Earths climate campaign.

Tescopoly website keeps on growing

The Tescopoly continues to expand - there are now a total of 82 local campaigns listed on the site.

Tescopoly also launched a new section with background information on the major

supermarket chains. The centrepiece of this section is a world map showing **the reach of Tesco across the globe.**



Tesco's focus for development is in the emerging retail markets of Eastern Europe and Southeast Asia. It is also developing an operation in the US and hoping to enter India.

Tesco's international operations are an increasingly important part of its business and are far more geared towards **environmentally unfriendly** hypermarkets than are its UK stores.

As well as the map there is a new section on the reach of all the supermarket chains' activities within the UK.

This section shows how the **supermarkets are diversifying into other areas of retail** as well as food. They are diversifying into unrelated areas such as finance and travel. They now sell everything from music downloads to legal advice and flu vaccines, and may soon be able to include legal firms and GP practices.

Please visit www.tescopoly.org to take a look at the new additions to this popular site.

OTHER NEWS & EVENTS

Environmental legal advice line

We have launched the UK's first national environmental legal advice line.

The free phone service has been set up by our Rights & Justice Centre, which aims to help people understand their rights and use the law to defend and improve their local environment.

Lawyers at the centre will be on hand to provide legal advice on environmental issues. Its aimed at people who are concerned about the impact of public authority decisions on their community and their local environment; people who don't feel they have been properly consulted about changes in their area; or to people who are simply unsure about their rights.

The legal advice line can be

contacted on FREEPHONE 0808 801 0405 between 6.30 - 8.30pm every Wednesday evening. It is staffed by Friends of the Earth's legal staff and by volunteer lawyers.

Individuals who contact the advice line will be given preliminary advice. Cases will then be either taken up by the Rights and Justice Centre or passed onto an organisation that can help.

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