

G.M. Crops-Points of Concern to Farmers, Growers & Consumers.

Organic Food is produced to internationally recognised standards, with care for the soil for animals, plants and human health as its core features.

Summary.

This submission from An tIonad Glas- the Organic College, staff, students and producers is centred on the direct threat that Genetically Modified Food presents to our livelihood, to biodiversity to the soil and the environment. It calls for a further moratorium on G. M. Crops for at least a year, for an informed public debate followed by a referendum.

Outline of the issues.

1. The technology is unsafe & consequences unknown.
2. The Precautionary Principle should be applied at present.
3. G.M. Technology is controlled by multinational corporations.
4. It reduces independence of family farms
5. It runs counter to Agro-ecological farming.
6. G.M. Crops will mean Bio-diversity loss and a Wild-life threat
7. It will increase our weed problems
8. The majority of farmers don't want it
9. Most consumers do not want it
10. Chefs do not want to use GM food in their restaurants
11. It is not sustainable and is fertiliser dependant
12. Its labelling is inadequate
13. No insurance company will cover it
14. It has negative tourism implications
15. Education & Public Consultation has been inadequate.

According to David Byrne (outgoing EU Health & Consumer Affairs) 'any member state may object to the marketing on their territory of any such GM variety if they consider there is a risk for human health, the environment or agronomic reasons.

Issues of Concern:

1. The technology is unsafe & consequences unknown, as there is the real possibility of unknown effects of some genes being expressed and of unstable horizontal gene transfer between species.
The crucial significance of food and especially organic food for human health makes this technology of special concern. It must be noted that research on the health risks of these products has been conducted predominantly by the companies which promote it.
2. The Precautionary Principle in this regard means that
 - a. Further study of the field and health consequences is needed before its acceptance in Ireland is considered.
 - b. In this study there is a strong case for making the island of Ireland a *G.M.* free Zone as a control in the E.U. experiment with *G.M.* Food.
3. *G.M.* Technology is controlled by multinational corporations - it is well known that the beneficiaries of this technology are the bio-technology companies, who also make the pesticide sprays for the crops and have an agenda other than the public good.
4. It reduces independence of family farms
 - a. There will be a loss of right to save & plant own seeds if *G.M.* patented. The possible introduction of a "terminator" gene further reduces the range of seed options.
 - b. Organic licences & certification is threatened and may be lost.
5. It runs counter to Agro-ecological farming.
 - a. *G.M.* Technology is a departure from traditional and time proven natural breeding & selection techniques. It carries the real possibility of contamination of organic and conventional crops.
 - b. This may be permanent damage as we cannot recall *GM* genes that pass into the wild.

6. *G.M.* Crops will mean Bio-diversity loss and a Wild-life threat.
 - a. This loss is inevitable if the focus is on chemical farming with larger fields and contamination of the flora & fauna which will be irreversible.
 - b. Loss of heritage seeds & plants is also a likely consequence.
7. It will increase our weed problems. Cross pollination of *G.M.* Crops with existing weed families can lead to super weeds. This is of major concern to us as organic producers who rely on non-chemical methods of weed control.
8. The majority of farmers don't want it.
 - a. It will reduce the value of food exports.
 - b. IFA vice-president, Irish Cattle & Sheep Farmers Assoc are amongst those opposed to release of *GM* seeds.
9. Most consumers do not want it
 - a. Strong opposition in Europe - 80% consumers are demanding *GM* free food & meat
 - b. What about consumer choice? - labelling is not satisfactory as there can be hidden *GM* ingredients below the threshold of mandatory labelling
10. Chefs do not want to use *GM* food in their restaurants - a large number of prominent chefs have opposed the introduction of *GM* crops through their own association and via the slow food movement.
11. It is not sustainable and is fertiliser dependant - As the world oil supply is limited and increasingly expensive, the focus on chemically dependant crops and agriculture is neither sustainable nor efficient. This is equally true in Ireland and in the developing world.
12. Its labelling is inadequate
 - a. The onus must be on the *G.M.* promoters to label their crops not on us producers of *G.M.* free crops to label our.

13. No insurance company will cover it.

- a. We note there is a total refusal by insurance companies to cover disaster risks associated with this technology. We are asking if the Department of Agriculture can seek insurance cover for organic producers who may lose their symbol as a result of GM Crop introduction.

14. It has negative tourism implications

Ireland's 'clean green image' has been a major factor in promoting our export of food and our grass-based livestock. This special status may be lost permanently.

15. Education & Public Consultation has been inadequate.

- a. There has been a lack of an awareness & educational campaign to show both sides of the argument. The Public has not been consulted - no referenda.
- b. It is for this reason that we call for a further moratorium of one year and a public referendum on the issue in advance of G.M. Crop acceptance.

Conclusion

From our experience as organic producers, we know that pollen, seeds, animal and plant material can be dispersed over very large distances. We believe that G. M. Crop technology is still at best imprecise, experimental and potentially dangerous. As we, or our public agencies are not in a position to control the pace, or regulation of this technology, we believe it is not appropriate to release it at present in Ireland.