

PRESS RELEASE

Cork, 24 August 2008 • GM-free Ireland Network

IRISH GOVERNMENT SLAMMED FOR GM FOOD CONFERENCE

The Irish Government is facing mounting international criticism for giving state financial support for the ABIC 2008 conference, which will be opened today (Sunday) at University College Cork by Billy Kelleher TD, Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment today.

The Agricultural Biotechnology International Conference [1] will promote the release of genetically modified algae, crops, trees, crustaceans, fish, poultry, livestock, animal feed and food, including GM pharma crops and pharma livestock that contaminate the food chain with agrofuels, drugs and industrial chemicals. The conference will be chaired by Prof. Jimmy Burke, head of Teagasc Crops Research Centre.

The controversial industry talkfest, which runs from 24-27 August, is organised by a Canadian foundation with funding from the Canadian Government, industry lobby groups, corporate agri-biotech giants Monsanto, BASF, Bayer CropScience, and BP Bio fuels, and the Gowlings law firm (which aided Monsanto's GMO patent infringement lawsuit against the Canadian farmer Percy Schmeiser, who lost ownership of his seeds and crops after being contaminated by Monsanto's GM seeds [2]). Irish tax-payers are funding the conference through Teagasc (the Agriculture and Food Authority), Science Foundation Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, the Marine Institute (Foras na Mara), the Food Safety Authority of Ireland, and Sustainable Energy Ireland.

Michael O'Callaghan of GM-free Ireland said "The Government is abusing our money to sabotage its own agreed policy to keep the whole island of Ireland off-limits to GM crops." [3] Clare Oxborrow of Friends of the Earth said "This Irish government promotion of agri-biotech industry interests is a scandal". US film director Deborah Koons Garcia (who produced "The Future of Food"), described it as "outrageous." [4] Celebrity Chef Darina Allen said Slow Food Ireland (a member of Slow Food International with 85,00 members in 132 countries) is opposed to the genetic modification of our food. [5]

Kathy Sinnott MEP said "As the Lisbon Treaty referendum made clear, the Irish Government is out of touch with reality. The EU Parliament supports the right of member states to ban GM crops as there is no market for GM food in Europe. It is clear that European consumers do not want GM food. Instead of funding GM industry propaganda like the ABIC conference, our Government should keep its promise to maintain Ireland as a GM-free crop zone and enable farmers to source affordable GM-free animal feed, thus providing a competitive advantage to Irish farmers and food producers for generations to come. [6]

Marco Contiero, who heads Greenpeace International's GM campaign, said "It's a real shame that public Irish money is used to finance this one-sided conference organised by the agri-biotech industry to promote its products. Instead of supporting these vested interests, the Irish Government should seriously address the health and environmental risks posed by GM crops, debate the scientific challenges behind such a risky technology and discuss the social and economic impacts that its endorsement can have." [7]

Lorcan Cribbin, Commissioner-General of Euro-toques Ireland, representing 200 leading Irish chefs, said: "GM seeds and crops hand over control of our food chain to huge corporations who care only for profit. The government has made no effort to hold an open and inclusive debate on this issue, and now is providing a platform for promoters of this technology which consumers reject and which the programme for government acknowledges is bad for Ireland. Our chefs have an obligation to source the safe, healthy, fresh, local, quality food which the majority of EU consumers demand. Any release of GM crops will contaminate our food chain in perpetuity, and destroy the brand reputation of 'Ireland — the food island'. We call on the Government to re-affirm its commitment to defend our food, farm and tourism sectors with strict laws to prevent any release of GM crops, fish or livestock on this island.

Senator David Norris said "I would be concerned if, as has been represented to me, ABIC 2008 is a one-sided promotional exercise and does not involve the kind of balance one would expect in a scientific forum - especially when tax payers' money is involved".

At a related press conference on Sunday, Kathy Sinnott MEP and Michael O'Callaghan will request the Government to fund an independent conference on GM-free food and farming, to implement legislation to prevent the release of GM crops on this island, and to protect Ireland's reputation by promoting the use of certified non-GMO animal feed in the production of meat, poultry and dairy produce.

RELATED PRESS CONFERENCE

With Kathy Sinnott MEP (EU Parliament IND/DEM Group), Michael O'Callaghan (GM-free Ireland), and John Brennan (Western Organic Network):

**Sunday 24 August at 18:00
O'Rahilly Building room 123
University College Cork**

CONTACT

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NOTES TO THE EDITOR

1. Agricultural Biotechnology Conference International 2008: <http://www.abic.ca/abic2008/>

2. The agri-biotech industry and Teagasc claim that GM crops are safe to eat, have higher yields, lower chemical inputs, and that they can "co-exist" with conventional and organic farming. But no long-term health studies prove GM food and animal feed are safe (see the book "Genetic Roulette: The Documented Health Risks of Genetically Engineered Foods" by Jeffrey M. Smith, available at the Cultivate Centre in Dublin or by mailorder from <http://www.geneticroulette.com>). Conclusive scientific evidence does prove that GM crops have lower yields, increase the use of weedkillers and/or produce their own pesticides, and rapidly contaminate the food chain. The UN Biosafety Protocol's GM Contamination Register clearinghouse reports 216 GM contamination incidents in 57 countries: <http://www.gmcontaminationregister.org>

In the landmark Monsanto vs. Schmeiser case, the Supreme Court of Canada interpreted the World Trade Organisation's Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) agreement to rule that farmers contaminated by GM pollen and/or GM seeds lose ownership of their seeds and crops and can be sued for patent infringement. For details see Percy Schmeiser interviews at <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/interviews/schmeiser.php> and <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/conference/trans/schmeiser.php>

3. The agreed programme for Government, announced by the Minister of State for Food and Horticulture Trevor Sargent, TD in June 2007, is "to seek to negotiate to declare the island of Ireland as a GM-free zone." This legislation, which has not yet been implemented, would prevent the environmental release of GM algae, bacteria, seeds, crops, trees, insects, crustaceans, fish, and livestock. It would not prohibit the importation of GM animal feed that has been approved by the EC regulatory bodies, or have any effect on the contained use of GM bacteria for the production of medicines in sealed vats in biosecure laboratories. The Government's GM-free Ireland commitment was recently confirmed by our Agriculture Brendan Smith, and by Agriculture Minister John Gormley who said "Ireland is the best place for a GM-free zone in the EU."

4. The highly recommended "The Future of Food" DVD is available from <http://www.thefutureoffood.com>

5 See <http://www.slowfoodireland.org>, <http://www.slowfood.com>, and interview with Vandana Shiva at <http://multimedia.slowfood.com/index.php?lng=2&method=multimedia&action=zoom&id=24086>

6. Contary to claims made by the agri-biotech industry, the Irish Grain and Feed Association, Teagasc and the Irish Farmers Journal, certified non-GMO animal feed is widely used in EU member states and regions that have adopted Quality Agriculture strategies. Interested stakeholders should attend the 2nd International Non-GMO soy Summit from 7-9 October in Brussels: <http://www.nongmosoysummit.com>

7. Monsanto and 4 other companies control 50% of the world's agricultural seeds. Monsanto controls 95% of the world's GM seeds. Most of the global food trade is controlled by Cargill and 4 other grain giants.

BACKGROUND

Monsanto and a handful of giant agri-biotech corporations are using patented GM seeds and propaganda to grab monopoly control of the global food supply, in a blatant attempt at corporate feudalism. No long-term health studies justify the claims that GM food and animal feed are safe. There is no market for GM-labelled food in Europe. GM crops are grown on 0.02% of EU arable land, and are rejected by the majority of EU food brands, retailers and consumers. In Ireland, 77% of consumers oppose the introduction of GM crops, and 71% refuse to eat food containing GM ingredients under any circumstances (survey published in "GM Crops and Food: Threat or opportunity for Ireland?", Irish Institute for Bioethics, 2005.)

18 county and town councils in the Republic and Northern Ireland, representing over 1 million consumers, have declared their areas off-limits to GM crops. See map at <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/map/>

The UN International Assessment of Agriculture and Technology for Development (IAASTD) report published earlier this year found that GM crops reduce agricultural biodiversity and food security, and have little if any role to play in increasing global food production: <http://www.agassessment.org>

The USA, Canada and Argentina are using the threat of WTO trade sanctions to try to get the EU to weaken its GM approvals process, to block mandatory labelling of meat, poultry and dairy produce from livestock fed on GM animal feed, and to prevent the establishment of GM-free crop zones including the island of Ireland.