

GM-free Ireland Network

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Brendan Smith T.D.
Minister for Agriculture, Food and Fisheries
Dáil Eireann
Kildare Street, Dublin 2

Friday 27 June 2008

Re. Hearing of evidence on GMOs by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

Dear Minister,

We are alarmed that the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is preventing a fair and balanced discussion on GM food and farming, at its next meeting on 2 July.

The Committee has invited 7 representatives from organisations which sell, use, or promote GM food and farming. These include Monsanto, Syngenta, Teagasc, the European Action on Global Life Sciences lobby group, and 2 pro-GM scientists from UCC [1]. Note that GM crops are grown on less than 2% of the world's farmland.

But the Committee has only invited 1 or 2 representatives from the GM-free Ireland Network, the umbrella group representing 130 diverse organisations which support the agreed Programme for Government to declare the Island of Ireland as a GMO-free crop zone and protect the reputation of Irish beef and dairy exports by encouraging the use of certified non-GMO animal feed. Note also that this group has the largest number and broadest diversity of stakeholders of any NGO in Ireland; its members (together with the populations of the 19 Local Authorities which have declared their areas to be GM-free zones) represent over 1 million citizens; and many of them depend on their ability to produce the safe GM-free conventional and organic food which the vast majority of EU retailers and consumers demand.

This democratic imbalance is a totally unacceptable abuse of Oireachtas procedure, and is also in breach of the Aarhus Convention on public participation in environmental decision making, signed by Ireland and the EU.

The agri-biotech industry is trying to use the rising costs of animal feed and food in a cynical attempt to force the EU member states to approve more patented GM seeds and GM feed and food against the wishes of the vast majority of their farmers, retailers and consumers. The industry now wants the member states to accept three proposals. The first is for the EU to scrap the "zero tolerance" policy for unapproved GM ingredients, by allowing up to 5% of untested GM ingredients to enter our food chain. The second proposal is to approve the introduction of GM agrofuel crops which have substantially contributed to rising feed and food prices; and the third is to approve GM pharma crops that would contaminate our food chain in perpetuity with pharmaceutical drugs and industrial chemicals.

18 different organisations in our Network contacted the Committee Chairman, Johnny Brady TD, requesting him to reschedule the discussion to a date in September so as to allow equal representation from both sides, including experts on the health, agronomic, biodiversity, environmental, economic, legal, and food security implications to be nominated by our constituents. We are dismayed by Mr. Brady's failure to reply, and by a phone call from the Committee Clerk who said the Committee has ignored our requests.

We therefore urge you — in your Ministerial capacity as an *ex officio* member of the Select Committee in accordance with Standing Order 92(1) — to invite the Joint Committee to take the following actions:

- Please re-schedule the discussion on GM food and farming to September, so as to give adequate time for an equal number of stakeholder representatives from both sides to clear their schedules;
- Kindly invite 7 expert speakers to be nominated by the GM free Ireland Network;
- To avoid the typical misrepresentations and misunderstandings that characterise the polarized and technical nature of any discussion on GM issues, enable the Committee to clarify, discuss and question opposing and contradictory statements in the presence of those who make them, by considering the views of all the invited stakeholders in a single sitting (instead of in two or three separate or back-to-back meetings).

We know your remit does not empower you to instruct the Committee, but hope you will communicate our request to its members, bearing in mind the recent U.N. International Assessment of Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) report which found that GM crops are not the solution to world hunger, the food security imperative to reduce our dependency on fossil fuel and chemical inputs, and the growing market trend for safe environmentally sustainable agriculture worthy of our reputation as *Ireland — the food island*.

We hope you will give this request your immediate attention, and respond to us as soon as you can.

Yours sincerely

Michael O'Callaghan
Co-ordinator, GM-free Ireland Network



with and on behalf of:

Vincent Cleary, Managing Director, Glenisk Organic Dairy
Josef Finke, Director, Ballybrado Ltd and Good Herdsmen Ltd
Charles Stanley-Smith, Chairman, An Taisce — The National Trust for Ireland
Bruce Darrell, Executive Committee, FEASTA — the Foundation for the Economics of Sustainability
Michael Ewing, Senior Researcher and Aarhus Convention expert, Sligo Institute of Technology
Dr. Elisabeth Cullen, Secretary, Irish Doctors Environmental Association
Lorcan Cribbin, Commissioner-General, Euro-Toques Ireland — The European Community of Cooks
John McKenna, Publisher, The Bridgestone Guides
Paolo Tullio, Food critic, Host, The Restaurant, RTE
Giana Ferguson, Convener, Slow Food Ireland
Darina Allen, Director, Ballymaloe Cookery School
Jill Bell, President, Irish Association of Health Stores
Seán McArdle, Director, Irish Farmers Markets Ltd
Kate Carmody, Chairperson, Irish Organic Farmers and Growers Association
Michael Miklis, Biodynamic Agricultural Association of Ireland
Anita Hayes, Founder, Irish Seedsavers Association
John Brennan, Chairman, Western Organic Network
Cornelius Traas, Chairman Irish Apple Growers Association
Anthony Ardee, Killruddery Farm
Tony Lowes, Director, Friends of the Irish Environment
Anja Murray, Natural Environment Officer, An Taisce — the National Trust for Ireland
Davie Phillip, Education Manager, Cultivate
Dr. Ruth McGrath, Chairperson, VOICE of Irish Concern for the Environment
Karin Dubsy, National Coordinator, Coastwatch Ireland
Sr. Marian O'Sullivan, Director, Dominican Ecology Centre, Wicklow
Julie Newman, Director, Dominican Organic Farm, Wicklow
Ian Wright, Project Coordinator, Irish Natural Forestry Foundation
John Haughton, Director, Forest Friends Ireland — Cairde na Coille
Andy Wilson, Director, Sustainability Institute
Aodhagan Downey, Chair, Sonairte — The National Ecology Centre
Bob Wilson, Director, CELT Centre for Environmental Living and Training
Brendan Price, Director, Irish Seal Sanctuary
Kerry O'Neill, Director, Glendalough Fayre
Fr. Seán McDonagh, Columban Missionaries
Caroline Robinson, Secretary, Cork Free Choice Consumer Group
Ross Lewis, Owner/Chef, Chapter One Restaurant, Dublin

cc. An Taoiseach, Brian Cowen

ENDNOTES:

1. The Committee invited the following 7 representatives from the pro-GMO side:

- Dr. Patrick O'Reilly, Manager, Monsanto Ireland;
- Syngenta: TBA.
- Irish Grain & Feed Association: TBA.
- Prof Jimmy Burke from Teagasc, which will host an international conference promoting GM seeds and crops from 24 – 27 August at UCC, on behalf of a Canadian biotech industry front group called the Agricultural Biotechnology International Conference (ABIC) Foundation, managed by Ag-West Bio Inc. and funded by Monsanto. ABIC's Board of Directors includes Jimmy Burke (the former head of Teagasc Crops Research), the conference chair Ashley O'Sullivan (a former Monsanto employee), Roger Kemble (President of Syngenta Biotechnology Inc), and Malcolm Devine (former employee of Aventis CropScience and Bayer CropScience!);
- Prof David McConnell from EAGLES (a task force of the European Federation of Biotechnology - www.efbweb.org - whose members include Monsanto Europe, the Association of German Biotech Companies, the Biotechnology Industry Organisation (USA), etc.
- Dr. Charles Spillane from UCC Dept of Biochemistry (who has the Canadian government agent Shane Morris in his lab): www.ucc.ie/spillane/pages/members.html
- Prof. Fergal O'Gara from BIOMERIT Research Centre, UCC Dept of Microbiology (which is developing GM soil bacteria): www.ucc.ie/biomerit