

NEWS ALERT

Dublin, Saturday 22 July 2006 • GM-free Ireland Network

www.gmfreeireland.org

CALL FOR DONEGAL TO BECOME GMO-FREE ZONE

Community discussion on Tory Island

The Future of Food film screening at Inishowen Summer Gathering

GM salmon would destroy native fisheries

Warning on contamination from Northern Ireland

As the most remote inhabited island 12 km off the coast of Ireland, who would think that Tory Island in Co. Donegal could be contaminated by genetically modified organisms (GMOs)? This could easily happen if patented genetically modified (GM) salmon - currently being developed in the USA and Canada - escape into the Atlantic [1].

And if Tony Blair and Bertie have their way, GM seeds and crops will soon be released in Britain and Ireland [2]. These would inevitably cross-contaminate conventional and organic crops by seed dispersal and wind-borne pollen, and unleash a plague of GM "superweeds" that will rapidly spread across farm land, national parks, golf courses, graveyards and lawns on both sides of the border. Once released into the sea or on land, GMOs are impossible to recall [3].

Because GM fish and crops are patented, contaminated farmers lose ownership of their crops and are required to pay annual patent fees or face patent infringement lawsuits from transnational corporate patent owners like Monsanto, which are rapidly buying up and patenting the world's agricultural seed supply. Whoever controls the seeds controls the food [4].

Contaminated farmers will also lose market share, because there is no market for GM food in Europe. Food containing 0.9% of GM ingredients must carry a GM label, but GM-labelled food is banned by the 60 largest food brands and food retailers in the EU because over 70% of European consumers refuse it.

Genetically modified organisms are made by inserting genetic material from other species. Most GM crops contain DNA from a virus and a bacterium, together with DNA from an animal or plant. GMOs include potatoes with spider DNA, tomatoes with fish DNA, and pigs with human DNA. Such genetic mixtures cannot occur in nature. They are genetically unstable and lead to crop failures, reduced yields, and increased use of toxic chemicals [5].

There is now growing scientific evidence of deaths and disease attributable to GM food and animal feed in laboratory animals, livestock and the human population [6].

Community discussions in Inishowen and Tory Island

Michael O'Callaghan, who co-ordinates the GM-free Ireland Network, and John Brennan, Chair of the Western Organic Network, have invited the people of Donegal to discuss the threat of GM fish and crops at the Inishowen Summer Gathering in Caratra, near Culdaff, at 7pm this evening (Saturday) and at the Ostán Thoraí hotel

on Tory Island at 8pm next Tuesday, 25 July.

The discussion on Tory will be preceded by a screening of the documentary film, *The Future of Food*, directed by Deborah Koons Garcia (widow of the late musician Gerry Garcia of the Grateful Dead). [7]

Speaking at the Green Ireland Conference in Kilkenny Castle in June, Ms Garcia said "If people have the choice to eat a genetically engineered potato or one which they grew or their neighbour grew, they're all going to choose the one they grew or their neighbour grew. That's just a human thing: it's our instinct to want healthy food. This is something you should think about in Ireland. Now is the time, because if we don't make these decisions now, and demand that we have the kind of future that we want, in the next five or ten years we're going to find ourselves living in a very different environment – and it will be too late, we will be too far down that road to change." [8]

According to Percy Schmeiser, a farmer and former Member of the Canadian Parliament who also spoke at the Green Ireland Conference, "GMO trout from an experimental fish farm in Canada have already escaped into a river that flows into Hudson Bay, which connects with the Atlantic Ocean. Nobody knows how soon escaped GM trout or salmon from our side of the Atlantic could show up in Irish waters." Mr Schmeiser faced a million dollar patent infringement lawsuit from Monsanto after his fields became contaminated by GMO rapeseed. [9]

John Brennan, who is also the Manager of the Leitrim Organic Farmers Coop, said the introduction of GM fish and crops would destroy Bord Bia's branding of *Ireland – the food island*. "The threat of GMOs affects all farmers and fishermen, whether they are conventional or organic. Ireland's organic farming industry would be forced to shut down, because organic certification prohibits all GM ingredients, but conventional farmers would also face massive economic losses. The introduction of GMOs would also have a devastating impacts on food producers, restaurants, hotels and the whole ecotourism sector including the Greenbox area which includes parts of South Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Cavan and Monaghan." [10]

Michael O'Callaghan's roots are in Inishowen. His paternal grandfather of the same name was an engineer who built the railroad extension from Letterkenny to Burtonport to carry Donegal fish all the way to London. His maternal grandfather, Senator Joe O'Doherty, represented the people of Donegal in the First Dáil. "That generation went through a difficult struggle for Ireland to become independent" he said, "but if we allow GM fish and crops on this island, we will face an new type of corporate colonialism that will last for ever this time, since it is impossible to recall GMOs once they have been released into the open."

Michael O'Callaghan and John Brennan will urge Donegal County Council to take pre-emptive action by declaring Donegal a GMO-free zone [11]. Counties Cavan, Clare, Fermanagh, Kerry, Meath, Monaghan, Roscommon and Westmeath now prohibit genetically modified (GM) seeds and crops, as do the local authorities of Bantry, Bray, Derry, Galway City, Navan, Newry, Mourne, and Clonakilty. Over 1,000 smaller local areas have also declared themselves to be GMO-free [12].

The campaign to keep Ireland GMO-free is supported by a growing number of Senators and TDs from all the political parties in the Republic. An online petition is available at <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/action/>

PHOTO OPPORTUNITIES

- This Saturday 21 July, 7pm:

Inishowen Summer Gathering, Caratra, Culdaff, Inishowen, Co. Donegal
Call for Donegal to declare itself a GMO-free zone
Speakers: Michael O'Callaghan (GM-free Ireland) and John Brennan
(Western Organic Network)

- Next Tuesday 25 July, 8pm:

Ostan Thorai, Tory Island, Co. Donegal
Community discussion and screening of the film "The Future of Food".
Speakers: Michael O'Callaghan (GM-free Ireland) and John Brennan
(Western Organic Network)

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NOTES

1. GM fish

Over thirty-five species of transgenic fish are currently being developed around the world. At least one company, Aqua Bounty Technologies Inc, in Massachusetts, USA, is presently requesting approval from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to market transgenic salmon which they claim can grow 10 to 30 times faster than normal salmon. Other GM fish include Arctic charr, trout, tilapia, turbot, and halibut.

According to the the US Center for Food Safety, "The release of genetically engineered fish can cause potentially devastating environmental and human health impacts. A 2001 National Academy of Sciences report states that the release of genetically engineered fish into the environment may threaten the survival of wild species. Furthermore, a 2004 Purdue University research study contains new experimental data that strengthens the plausibility of the 'Trojan gene' effect first demonstrated in a 1998 study. By incorporating more biological data into a population model, researchers showed that growth-enhanced genetically engineered fish could lead to the extinction or replacement of wild fish populations.

As with the growing of non-native fish, the use and sale of genetically engineered fish in offshore and ornamental aquaculture facilities poses serious threats to the diversity and well being of native fish."

Transgenic fish are opposed worldwide by fishermen, fish retailers, chefs, leading restaurants and consumers. In the USA, a campaign called "Protect Our Waters from Genetically Engineered Fish" asked US grocery store chains, fish distributors, and restaurants to support the petitioners' call for a moratorium on the approval of GM fish and to pledge that they will not buy or sell GM fish should the FDA allow them on the market.

For more information on the threat of GM fish, visit the GM-free Ireland web site section on GM fish at <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/fish>

See also the US Center for Food Safety at <http://www.centerforfoodsafety.org/geneticall3.cfm>

2. On 20 July 2006, the UK Government published proposals to allow widespread GM contamination in the British countryside. The Daily Telegraph described the plan to grow GM crops in secret locations as "irresponsible."

In 1997 Fianna Fáil pledged never to allow GM food and crops in Ireland, but made a policy U-turn after Bertie Ahern was lobbied to do so by then US National Security Adviser Sandy Berger at the White House on St. Patrick's Day 1998. Since then, the Irish Government has never voted against the legalisation of GM food and crops in the European Council of Ministers, and is now in the final stage of developing a National Strategy "to ensure the co-existence of GM crops with conventional and organic farming". For more information, see <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/coexistence/>

3. For more information on GM food and farming, visit the GM-free Ireland web site at <http://www.gmfreeireland.org>

4. See Green Ireland Conference speech by Percy Schmeiser at <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/conference/trans/P.Schmeiser.pdf>

and speech by Vandana Shiva at <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/conference/trans/V.shiva.pdf>

5. See <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/crops/>

6. See <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/health/>

7. See <http://www.thefutureoffood.com>. "The Future of Food" is an award-winning documentary that provides an in-depth look at the genetically modified foods controversy. Shot on location in the U.S., Canada and Mexico, the film examines the complex web of market and political forces that are changing what we eat as huge multinational corporations seek to control the world's food system through patented GM crops which invade conventional and organic crops and require contaminated farmers to pay annual patent royalties or face patent-infringement lawsuits. The film explores alternatives to large-scale industrial agribusiness, placing organic and sustainable agriculture as solutions to the global farm crisis. Produced by Deborah Koons Garcia. 90 minutes. You can order the DVD for €25 from GM-free Ireland on (0404) 43 885.

8. See <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/conference/trans/D.KoonsGarcia.pdf>

9. See Green Ireland Conference speech by Percy Schmeiser at <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/conference/trans/P.Schmeiser.pdf>

10. For information on the Greenbox integrated ecotourism scheme see <http://www.greenbox.ie>

11. The Irish and UK governments still do not recognise the democratic legal right of local authorities to prohibit GM seeds and crops. But eight European countries have total or near total bans on GMOs, as do 175 regional governments, 3,500 local authorities and 1,000 smaller areas across 22 EU member states. For details visit the

GMO-free Europe web site at <http://www.gmofree-europe.org>

Irish and Northern Irish Local Authorities wishing to declare themselves a GMO-free zone should pass a Motion to:

- (a) prohibit the cultivation of GMO seeds, crops, trees, insects, crustaceans, fish, poultry and livestock in its area;
- (b) exclude Local Authority funding for the procurement of food containing GM ingredients in schools, hospitals, nursing homes, canteens etc.; and
- (c) prohibit the transportation, storage, or use of live GMO seeds (including rape seed approved for animal feed), as well as any GM crops, trees, insects, crustaceans, fish, poultry and livestock on its land, water, and airspace.

12. See map of Irish GMO free zones at <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/map>