



GM Nation? Manchester Decides This Week

For immediate
release

Photo Opportunity: Photo Call at **6:45pm on Wednesday 16th July** at the Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester before the debate. Chair, speakers and representatives from Manchester Friends of the Earth and Unicorn Grocery will be available at this time.

Manchester Friends of the Earth [1] and Unicorn Grocery [2] invite members of the public to hear, discuss and vote upon the issue of growing Genetic Modified crops (GM) commercially in Britain. At a public meeting at the Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, between **7 and 9pm on Wednesday 16th July** a panel will give presentations for and against GM crops followed by a discussion and questions from the floor.

Participants will be able to fill in questionnaires, which will then be sent to the Government as part of the ongoing consultation – ‘GM Nation’ [3]. There will be also be a vote on two motions: whether the potential benefits of GM outweigh the risks and whether Manchester should declare itself a GM-free zone.

The panel has now been confirmed as:

- Lance Crooks, Manchester Green Party, Chair
- Jonathan from Corporate Watch, speaking against the commercial growing of GM Crops
- Sue Meyer of Genewatch, talking a neutral stance
- Beth Knowles, speaking in favour of the commercial growing of GM Crops. Beth is not personally in favour of the technology, but the organisers have found it impossible to find an advocate prepared to speak despite approaching many organisations who are pro-GM.

The organisers believe that the Government seems keen to push ahead with growing GM crops commercially, and it is therefore crucial that the people of Manchester have an opportunity to hear the arguments for and against and have their say in the decision. A Consumer Association survey noted that less than one third of the population found GM foodstuffs acceptable [4]. There are many issues to be debated including the potential risks to health, to the environment and to farmers.

CONTACTS FOR COMMENT: Graeme Sherriff, Manchester FoE, 07905 790426
Beth Knowles, Unicorn Grocery, 07833 774775

For those who cannot attend the meeting, there is an online questionnaire at www.gmnation.org.uk.

Graeme Sherriff, Co-ordinator of Manchester Friends of the Earth says: *'GM crops should not be planted in the UK until their safety and need is proven and until the public accept them. This debate is a crucial one. The risks are too great to take this decision lightly and without public consent.'*

Beth Knowles, of Unicorn Grocery is anxious that the public be heard: *'We felt strongly that the public should be made aware of this debate and be invited to join it. As an organic grocer we are concerned about the impact of GM contamination of organic crops and the effect this will have on our business.'*

Lance Crooks of Manchester Green Party, who are chairing the debate, is looking forward to an open and informed debate: *'We welcome the opportunity for people to get together for what I believe will be a lively debate on the pros and cons of this extremely important issue.'*

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Notes for Editors

1. Manchester Friends of the Earth is a prominent pressure group, raising awareness and lobbying for policy changes at a local, regional, national and international level. The group consists entirely of volunteers, and its campaigns are funded by membership fees and individual donations. Up-to-date information is available on their website: <http://www.manchesterfoe.org.uk>. Manchester Friends of the Earth is part of a national network of local groups, affiliated to the national organisation (further information can be found at <http://www.foe.co.uk>).
2. Unicorn Grocery is a local organic food shop in South Manchester. It opened in 1986 and has been run since then as a worker co-operative owned, run by its own workforce, and is committed to bringing wholesome organic food to its customers. It has a turnover of more than £1 million and is one of the largest and most successful wholefood outlets in the UK. (Website: <http://www.unicorn-grocery.co.uk/>)
3. The national discussion on GM consists of three components: a public debate (of which this Manchester FoE event is part), a government science review and an economics study. (Website: <http://www.gmnation.org.uk/>) The deadline for questionnaire returns is 18th July.
4. <http://www.which.net/campaigns/food/gm/findings.html>

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