



GM Nation Too Risky For Us

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Photo Opportunity: A photo of the debate is available on request.

Manchester residents spoke out against the commercial growing of Genetic Modified crops (GM) in Britain at a public meeting in the city centre on Wednesday 16th July. Out of an audience of 130, of those who voted (115) all bar one person (who abstained) were in favour of the following motion: the potential risks of GM crops outweigh the potential benefits. And 112 were in favour of Manchester declaring itself a GM-free zone with only one against.

The event was hosted by Manchester Friends of the Earth [1] and Unicorn Grocery [2], and featured a panel of experts giving presentations for and against GM crops, which was followed by a discussion and questions from the floor. The panel consisted of:

- 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 had found it impossible to find an advocate prepared to speak despite approaching many organisations who are pro-GM.

Participants were handed questionnaires to complete, which were then forwarded to the Government as part of an ongoing consultation – ‘GM Nation’ [3]. For those who were unable to attend the meeting but who wish to participate in the ongoing discussion, an online questionnaire is accessible at www.gmnation.org.uk until 18th July.

A Consumer Association survey noted that less than one third of the population found GM foodstuffs acceptable [4] and supermarkets are refusing to sell the products [5]. This evening's results reinforces these concerns, for which there are many good reasons [6]:

- Local organic food businesses would suffer if the crops they rely on were contaminated with GM: they would lose the organic certification.

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- There have been no properly controlled clinical trials on the effects of GM on human health.
- Use of herbicide resistant crops has actually increased the use of herbicides in many cases, not good news for the environment and wildlife.
- Less than 1 per cent of GM research and develop is aimed at resource-poor farmers, and so far GM is proving more expensive and giving lower yields. Small-farmers would have to stop their age-old practice of saving seeds from year to year.

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. Neither of these criteria have been satisfied.'*

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.'*

ENDS

Contacts for Comment

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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>

5. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/gmdebate/Story/0,2763,998997,00.html>

6. The Ecologist, July/August 2003

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