

GM trials are 'genetic tyranny' says Greenpeace, as Government announces massive expansion in GM experiments

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Greenpeace today accused the Government of genetic tyranny as the DETR announced an 800% increase in the number of 'farm scale trial' sites for genetically modified crops.

Peter Melchett, Executive Director of Greenpeace in the UK, said, "This is a potential tragedy for the environment. Britain will be bombarded with GM pollen with no regard for wildlife, the public or GM-free farmers. The whole process has been nothing short of genetic tyranny with an almost complete absence of public consultation".

The new sites will be planted with herbicide resistant oil seed rape, sugar beet and fodder maize.

Greenpeace GM Campaigner Sarah North said: "The Government seems hell-bent on spending tax-payers money to promote a polluting technology which no-one wants and which poses real threats to GM-free farmers, organic growers and bee-keepers".

She continued: "Greenpeace believes that these trials are a PR exercise by a government under intense pressure to allow the agro-chemical industry to steam ahead with the development of GM crops in the UK, despite the complete absence of a market".

In response to the announcement Greenpeace will be launching a nationwide GM-Free Zones Campaign. This will give local authorities, farmers, growers and consumers the opportunity to organise resistance to GM crops. Greenpeace will also be leafleting communities around trial sites, to inform local people of the trial locations and the hazards that trials pose.

Sarah North added: "Around each of the GM trials last year we witnessed strong local campaigns to oppose GM pollution. We can expect to see that replicated on a massive scale as trials spread across the country".

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EDITOR'S NOTES:

Greenpeace can put journalists in contact with farmers opposed to GM crops and supply images of farms displaying GM Free signs.

For more information call the Press Office on 0171 865 8255/6/7 or 07801 212993

[1] The farm scale trials are Government-sponsored field trials of four kinds of GM crop: spring oil seed rape, winter oil seed rape, maize and beet. They are intended to assess the environmental impacts of GM crops on UK biodiversity but have been widely attacked as representing an unacceptable source of genetic pollution.

[2] Twenty-eight Greenpeace volunteers go on trial at Norwich Crown Court on April 3rd to face charges relating to an action at a field trial of GM maize in July last year.

Background Information - Why Greenpeace Opposes Farm Scale Trials:

The Government has argued that farmscale trials will demonstrate whether GM crops could be grown on a full commercial scale in the UK because careful scientific evaluation would determine if wildlife was being harmed.

Greenpeace has rejected the Government's arguments for conducting the farmscale trials for the following reasons:

- * The trials themselves will lead to widespread GM pollution because of pollen dispersal and soil contamination from the GM crops. The Greenpeace action at Lyng was intended to stop this happening
- * The trials are already being used as a trojan horse for introducing GM crops into the countryside despite the fact that most people don't want them and there is virtually no market for the crops
- * The real future of farming lies in GM-free, chemical-free systems of farming which produce the food that people want to eat. GM crops will mean the end of organic farming and take us further down the road of intensive agriculture which has already caused so much harm to the environment.

There are also many other reasons why farmers should be wary of GM crop trials. For instance:

- * There is no market for GM produce.
- * Uncertainties over liability for pollution damage caused to nearby farmers growing GM-free crops as well as organic farmers, bee keepers and others
- * Concerns over long-term contamination of soil by GM crops
- * Concerns over land which has been used for GM crops going onto a special register as recommended by the Royal Institute for Chartered Surveyors

* Unwillingness of supermarkets to purchase crops grown on land used for GM trials and a possible decline in land values because of soil contamination

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