

gm-free ireland

WWW.GMFREEIRELAND.ORG

PRESS RELEASE



IRELAND ADOPTS GM-FREE ZONE POLICY

- **Government to ban cultivation of all GM plants**
- **Voluntary GM-free label for meat, poultry, eggs, fish and dairy produce**

GM-free Ireland Network press release, 13 October 2009

www.gmfreeireland.org/press/GMFI45.pdf

DUBLIN — The Irish Government will ban the cultivation of all GM crops and introduce a voluntary GM-free label for food – including meat, poultry, eggs, fish, crustaceans, and dairy produce made without the use of GM animal feed.

The policy was adopted as part of the Renewed Programme for Government agreed between the two coalition partners, the centre-right Fianna Fáil and the Green Party, after the latter voted to support it on Saturday.

The agreement specifies that the Government will “Declare the Republic of Ireland a GM-Free Zone, free from the cultivation of all GM plants”. The official text also states “To optimise Ireland’s competitive advantage as a GM-Free country, we will introduce a voluntary GM-Free logo for use in all relevant product labelling and advertising, similar to a scheme recently introduced in Germany.” [1]

The President of the Irish Cattle and Sheepfarmers Association, Malcolm Thompson, said he was delighted by the announcement, adding, “The Government’s new GM-free policy is the fulfillment of what we at ICSA have held for the last five years. I very much look forward to its full implementation.” [2]

Michael O’Callaghan of GM-free Ireland said the policy signals a new dawn for Irish farmers and food producers: “The WTO’s economic globalisation agenda has forced most Irish farmers to enter an unwinnable race to the bottom for low quality GM-fed meat and dairy produce, in competition with countries like the USA, Argentina and Brazil which can easily out-compete us with their highly subsidised GM crop monocultures, cheap fossil fuel, extensive use of toxic agrochemicals that are not up to EU standards, and underpaid migrant farm labour.

“Meanwhile, hundreds of European food brands, retailers and Regions now offer GM-free beef, pork, lamb, poultry, eggs, fish and dairy produce as part of their Food Safety, Quality Agriculture, Biodiversity, Fair Trade, Sustainable Development and Climate Change strategies. Thousands of brands in the USA are doing likewise. Without a GM-free label to distinguish our produce, Irish food is being excluded from this global market.”

“The Irish Government plan to ban GM crops and to provide a voluntary GM-free label for qualifying animal produce makes obvious business sense for our agri-food and eco-tourism sectors [3]. Everyone knows that US and EU consumers, food brands and retailers want safe GM-free food, and Ireland is ideally positioned to deliver the safest, most credible GM-free food band in Europe, if not the world.”

The international market for GM-free animal produce is growing rapidly

- Across Europe, hundreds of leading food brands (including the largest dairy coop, Friesland Campina) and dozens of leading retailers (including the largest, Carrefour) now offer premium meat, fish, eggs, poultry eggs and dairy produce made without the use of GM feedstuffs. These are backed by GM-free labels and Government regulations in Austria, Italy, Germany, with France to follow later this year. Sales of GM-free milk have skyrocketed since the label came into effect in Germany [4].
- In the USA, to which Ireland exports vast quantities of dairy produce (including milk powder and casein for cheese production), leading food manufacturers, retailers, processors, distributors, farmers, seed breeders and consumers have set up joint venture called the Non-GMO Project, which already provides GM-free labels for over 1,000 food products by individual manufacturers in addition to thousands of GM-free private retail brands [5].

Unique selling point for Irish food

Ireland's geographical isolation and offshore Atlantic western winds provide a natural barrier to contamination by wind-borne GM pollen drift from countries such as the UK and Spain which still allow commercial release and/or field trials of GM crops [6]. Together with this natural protection – and Ireland's famous green image and unpolluted topsoil – the new GM-free policy will provide Irish farmers and food producers who avoid the use of GM feed with a truly unique selling point: the most credible safe GM food brand in Europe." [7]

Moreover, because most Irish cattle and sheep enjoy a grass-based diet, their consumption of GM feedstuffs is lower than livestock in many competing countries. This provides Irish farmers with a valuable lead start in phasing out the use of GM feed [8]. The only obstacle is the Irish animal feed cartel, which has a virtual monopoly on feed imports, and seems unwilling to provide the affordable Non-GM feedstuffs available to farmers in other European countries [9].

Back in 2007, the Irish Government adopted a weaker policy "to seek to negotiate to declare the island of Ireland as a GMO-free zone", but the two opt-out clauses did not inspire conviction; failure to define the implications of the policy for GM animal feed created confusion in the farming sector [10] and the Government failed to even draft any related legislation to implement the policy. That said, Ireland did stop voting in favour of new GMOs in Brussels and has since joined the majority of EU member states which back an Austrian proposal for the EU Commission to allow national bans on GM crops [11]. In response to this move, the EU Commission indicated its willingness to consider national bans earlier this year [12].

Although Ireland's new affirmative GM-free policy unambiguously aims to ban both commercial release as well as field trials of GM crops, it requires implementing legislation in the Republic, as well as Northern Ireland to prevent contamination from across the border [13].

A label that means what it says

O'Callaghan said the Irish GM-free label for algae, meat, poultry, eggs, crustaceans, fish, and dairy produce should set a higher standard than the existing German and proposed French labels, which mislead consumers by allowing GM-free claims for animal produce from livestock whose diet has included large amounts of GM feedstuffs for varying periods before they are converted into food [14]: "Ireland's GM-free label should mean what it says, i.e. no feeding of any GM-labelled feedstuffs during the entire life of the animal. Specifically, the label should guarantee that the animal has been fed either on plant materials for which no GMO varieties exist, or on fodder crops that contain no GMO ingredients above the generally accepted detection level of 0.1 per cent. To avoid misleading consumers, the EU should to adopt a credible GM-free labelling regulation of this kind for the whole single market, instead of allowing individual member state to set their own standards, which can be not only confusing, but also deceptive. The Irish Government is now in a position to lead on this."

International reaction

Jochen Koester, a leading soy industry adviser who runs *TraceConsult™* in Geneva, Switzerland, said: "The Irish Government's decision is very timely and deserves congratulations. In a very natural way, this will increase the Irish farmers' demand for Non-GMO animal nutrition that permits GMO-free claims on the final animal product. Increased import volumes and lower per-tonne logistics costs will bring down the price of certified Non-GMO imported soy meal. Irish farmers can thus soon join the ranks of "GMO-free" producers from Austria, Germany and France. This enhanced supplier platform will also create a lot more clout for all players in the Non-GMO food and feed industries." [15]

In London, the Irish Michelin-starred celebrity chef and TV host Richard Corrigan laughed out loud when he heard the news at his Bentley's Mayfair restaurant, adding that "the eyes of Europe will now gaze with envy on Ireland!" (Corrigan created a stir in Irish farming circles earlier this year when he denounced Bord Bia [the Irish Food Board] on his TV programme for providing its Quality Assurance label to meat and dairy produce from livestock fed on GM feedstuffs which are excluded from such labels in more food-savvy EU countries [16]).

Reacting to the announcement in Rome, Greenpeace EU GMO Policy Director Marco Contiero said "Greenpeace welcomes this decision by the Irish Government. It puts an additional brake on the global expansion of the risky, unproven and costly technology of genetically modified agriculture. Ireland's GM-free policy answers the serious concerns which European consumers have on GM food, and will allow Irish retailers and businesses to be rewarded for the good quality produce they bring to the market." [17]

Commenting from the USA, the Executive Director of the Non-GMO Project [18] Megan Thompson said "Ireland has taken a truly inspiring step towards ensuring consumers' right to choose non-GMO products... As more and more companies in the USA and Canada are looking for non-GMO ingredients, this is a very timely move and we look forward to developing sourcing opportunities with GM-free producers in Ireland."

Speaking for GM-Free Cymru in Wales, Dr Brian John said: "We congratulate the Irish Government on this very bold step, which is underpinned by sound science and by a proper regard for the precautionary principle. It is also a very smart commercial move which will give Ireland a competitive advantage. We hope that Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland will now follow suit by making similar declarations and by showing the Westminster government that its slavish adherence to a pro-GM agenda is scientifically untenable and out of step with the public mood." [19]

Pete Riley of the UK's GM Freeze Campaign said "This is a brave and sensible policy decision by the Irish Government, and a major step towards a GM-free Europe. It illustrates just how unacceptable GM crops and food are becoming in the EU. It is time the US government and biotech companies took notice of these very strong messages and stopped trying to force GM crops down the throats of an unwilling European population. Trade is about providing what customers want, but when it comes to GM crops the US industry and government seem to have forgotten this fundamental rule of commerce. We wish Ireland well and hope the London government follow suit as soon as possible". [20]

In Brussels, Friends of the Earth Europe's GMO campaign co-ordinator Helen Holder said "All around Europe, countries are putting up bans or other limits to growing genetically modified crops and the Irish government is to be congratulated. The EU should drop genetically modified food and crops, and instead support green farming which is good for the economy and for the planet". [21]

ENDS

CONTACT

Michael O'Callaghan
Co-ordinator, GM-free Ireland Network
mobile: + 353 (0)87 799 4761
tel: + 353 (0)404 43885
email: mail@gmfreeireland.org

NOTES TO THE EDITOR

1. The GM-free policy was made official on page 11 of the Renewed Programme for Government published on 10 October 2009, which can be downloaded from:
http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/eng/Publications/Publications_2009/Renewed_Programme_for_Government,_October_2009.pdf

2. On 17 June 2004, the Irish Cattle and Sheep Farmers Association called on the Government to pursue an all-Ireland GM-free policy as part of an integral strategy to leverage Ireland's green image and boost our share of farm exports. ICSA Rural Development Chairman John Heney said "our island status provides an unique opportunity for a credible GM-free policy for high value beef and lamb export markets." In a related press release, ICSA President Malcolm Thompson said "the single most important challenge for Irish agriculture is to build on the momentum of increased demand for Irish beef and lamb by strengthening our image as Ireland - the food island. We need to capitalise on a green image, and tap into the demand for natural products."

On 15 January 2009, at a meeting of the Irish Government's Joint Oireachtas (Parliament and Senate) Committee on European Affairs, Malcolm Thompson said "The ICSA would like to see a retail environment where consumers are always able to choose European product where the quality and origin is clearly defined and easily understood. We see this as a system of regulated logos and labels whereby farmers are recognised for their efforts. Each product would indicate country of origin and demonstrate that it was produced to the EU baseline standard. For those producers who go to the next level, those producers who go that extra mile and participate in REPS or who are farming organically, or who can certify that their product is GM-free or grass-fed, should have their niche also clearly identified on the label."

3. See proceedings of the Green Ireland Conference on branding for food, farming and eco-tourism, hosted by GM-free Ireland and An Taisce, Kilkenny Castle, June 2006:
<http://www.gmfreeireland.org/conference>

4. While German consumers drink less fresh milk than one year ago and the overall market is declining, Friesland Campina's GM-free Landliebe premium milk brand has shown significant success, with a 7.7 percent sales increase in the first seven months of 2009. Source: "GM-free Landliebe Country Milk catches on in Germany - increased sales confirm acceptance", Friesland Campina press release, September 2009: <http://www.en.frieslandcampina.com>

5. The Non-GMO Project is a US-based non-profit collaboration of manufacturers, retailers, processors, distributors, farmers, seed breeders and consumers who share the belief that everyone deserves an informed choice about whether or not to consume genetically modified products, and a common mission to ensure the sustained availability of non-GMO choices. The Non-GMO Project has enrolled over 1,000 food products by individual manufacturers in its non-GMO verification program, in addition to thousands of private retail labels (such as those of industry giant Whole Foods Market, Inc.) that are also in the process of becoming "Non-GMO Project Verified". For details see: <http://www.nongmoproject.org>

6. There has never been any commercial release of GM crops on the island of Ireland, and the only field trial of GM crops that took place in the Republic was stopped by protestors in 1998. This is not the case in other EU member states. Despite national and regional bans or

moratoria on the commercial cultivation of GM crops in Austria, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland and Switzerland, many of these countries have previously allowed (or been illegally subjected to) the commercial release of GM crops, and many of them still allow uncontained GM field trials. Banning GM crops in a given country does not guarantee their absence there, and conducting field trials usually results in contamination, which can travel across borders and is frequently irreversible.

7. See "The Transition to GM-free Meat and Dairy Production in Ireland – the Food Island"; PowerPoint presentation to the Second International Non-GMO Soy Summit, 7-9 October 2009, Brussels. Download (1.92MB):
<http://www.gmfreeireland.org/feed/documents/SoySummit2/GMFI-SoySummit2008.pdf>

8. According to the Department of Agriculture and Food, 95% of the following annually imported animal feedstuffs are GM (data for 2007): soya and soya by-products (607,367 tonnes), maize (211,542 tonnes), maize by-products (395,525 tonnes), and oilseed rape (a.k.a. Canola) and its by-products (239,072 tonnes).

The GM maize, gluten and distiller's grains are mostly a by-product of the US biofuel and beer industries. The GM soy meal, soy pellets and soy husks are mostly from Brazil and Argentina, which take care to plant only GM varieties that are approved for food and/or feed in the EU.

The GM soy is resistant to Monsanto's RoundUp and other herbicides and is drenched in these products which are not biodegradable and are far more toxic than originally claimed. The GM crops (mostly maize) produce many new types of Bt pesticide, which have never been subject to diligent risk assessment in the USA or the EU. Some GM crop have both traits.

However, Ireland's cattle and sheep have a very low per capita consumption of GM feedstuffs:

- Cattle: 86-90% grass-based diet, with 10-14% compound feed rations 30-50% of which are made up of GM ingredients. GM feed thus = only 3-7% of average total cattle diet.
- Sheep: 40% eat only grass, 60% eat grass supplemented with compound feeds, of which 15-17% soy & maize products, 95% of which are GM. GM feed thus = 9-11% of average total sheep diet

This provides Irish farmers, food producers, livestock exporters, and other stakeholders with a lead start in phasing out the use of GM feed, and the ability to do so with less hassle and expense than many other competing countries. Our low use of GM feed provides us with an untapped competitive advantage.

9. Many members of the feed import cartel have strong links to agribiotech companies, pro-GM industry groups and commodity traders with a vested interest in promoting GM feedstuffs. The Irish Grain and Feed Association and the Northern Ireland Grain Trade Association repeatedly claim that Non-GMO feed (which is widely imported in other EU member states) does not exist or would be unaffordable to bring to Ireland!

These are obviously false claims. 99% of EU maize is GM-free and certified Non-GMO soya is available from Brazil, China, India and even the USA.

For example, 100% of the animal feed in Switzerland is GM-free. In Sweden the figure is 90%. In France, 20% to 25% of the country's soymeal imports - between 500,000 and 600,000 tonnes annually - are Non-GMO (equivalent to all of Ireland's soymeal imports in 2007). Most comes from Brazil, some from India. France's leading importer, Agrifeed (based in Brest, Brittany), charges a small premium (approx €25-27 per tonne in summer, €30-32 in winter) for Non-GM soymeal regularly imported from Brazil via the port of Montoire, near Nantes. These ships could easily unload part of their cargo at Belfast, Foynes, Cork, Waterford or Dublin, providing enough certified Non-GMO soy to enable every farmer on this island to enter (or

retain access to) the EU market for GM-free animal produce.

10. The confusion arose because although the previous Government policy to declare the island as a GMO-free zone made no mention of any ban on GM animal feed, the pro-GM lobby used an obsolete policy statement from the Green Party website which aimed to "prohibit the use of GM ingredients in animal feed". For some strange reason, the Government failed to correct this disinformation, thus enabling the GM lobby to scaremonger the public with visions of starving cattle and farmers bankrupt farmers due to arrival of the Green Party in Government.

11. Austria presented its proposal ("Genetically Modified Organisms - A Way Forward") for the EC to allow national bans on GM crops at the Council of Agriculture Ministers in June 2009. The text states "Given the unsatisfactory situation and the negative attitude towards GMOs in large parts of the population in many member states, the time has come to find a new approach to deal with the authorisation and use of GMOs in agriculture... The soundest legal solution we can envisage is a set of minor amendments of relevant EU legislation, which should introduce the right of an individual member state to restrict or prohibit indefinitely the cultivation of authorised GMOs on its territory."

The proposal was co-signed by Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Slovenia and the Netherlands; it was subsequently backed by France, Poland, Portugal, and parts of the German government, and is now supported by the majority of member states. The proposal can be accessed here:

<http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/09/st11/st11226-re01.en09.pdf>. For additional information, see "EU Member States Seek Solution for Biotech Crop Debate", International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development, Bridges Trade BioRes, Volume 9, Number 12, 26 June 2009: <http://ictsd.net/i/news/biores/49590/>

12. The EC indicated its support in principle for national GM crop bans in July 2009 when the Environment Commissioner Stavros Dimas announced he would ask all member states to give their input on socio-economic criteria that would allow EU member states to opt out of GMO cultivation. Source: "Austria pushes for GMO opt-out clause", European Biotechnology News, July 15 2009: http://greenbio.checkbiotech.org/news/austria_pushes_gmo_opt_out_clause

13. In September 2008, the Northern Ireland Minister for Agriculture and Rural Affairs, Michelle Gildernew MP, said: "We must protect the diversity of both plants and animals, and avoid damaging natural resources and contributing to climate change... Once we go down the GM route there is no going back: we need to keep Ireland GM-free. And I think that issue – we might not fully recognise it now, but in a very short period of time we could have a unique selling point that nobody else in the world has. And I think as an island economy, we have to protect our status."

Although the UK is one of the few remaining EU member states whose government still officially supports GM food and farming, the UK regions of Scotland and Wales also strongly oppose the release of GM crops. This leaves Westminster isolated with only a few English counties still in favour of GM crops in the whole of the UK.

14. Germany introduced its GM-free "Ohne Gentechnik" label in May 2008 for meat, fish, poultry, eggs and dairy produce. But the related regulation is very misleading, since it allows the use of the label for meat and dairy produce from livestock species fed on GM feedstuffs until a short period before their transformation into food. The periods are 4 months for pigs, 3 months for beef and cows, 10 weeks for poultry, and 6 weeks for eggs). The proposed French regulation is expected to be published in late 2009.

Details of the existing German and proposed French regulations for GM-free animal feed labels are available in a short PowerPoint presentation by French lawyer Blanche Magariños-Rey at the GM-free food certification and labelling workshop hosted by the GM-free Ireland in Dublin on 20 March 2009:

<http://www.gmfrireland.org/downloads/GMO-freeLabellingClaims.ppt>

15. *TraceConsult*[™] provides strategic intelligence on questions of availability and general market information for Non-GM soy products. Contact:

Jochen Koester

TraceConsult[™]

Geneva, Switzerland

tel + 41 22 819 9400

email: jk@traceconsult.ch

web: www.traceconsult.ch

16. "Big mouth Corrigan raises Hackles", Irish Farmers Journal, 16 May 2009.

17. Greenpeace EU Unit: <http://www.greenpeace.org/eu-unit/campaigns/say-no-to-genetic-engineering>

18. The US market for GM-free food is expanding later but far more quickly than in Europe. For information on the Non-GMO project, see note 5 above.

19. GM-free Cymru (Wales): <http://www.gmfreecymru.org>

20. GM Freeze (UK): <http://www.gmfreeze.org>

21. Friends of the Earth Europe - GMOs, Food and Farming Campaign:
<http://www.foeeurope.org/GMOs/Index.htm>