



Anti-environment double whammy - David Miliband's 'green' credentials exposed

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In an anti-environment double whammy, the Government has today (20 July) published proposals to allow widespread GM contamination in the British countryside, as well as failing to protect the public against the dangers of pesticides spraying.

The Government's latest proposals are in effect denying all consumers, organic or non-organic, the right to choose non-GM food. In addition, the Government has rejected key recommendations by the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution (RCEP), designed to protect the public from unnecessary risks of pesticides spraying. These two decisions combined give a first indication of just how 'green' Secretary of State for the Environment, David Miliband, really is.

Commenting on the Government's proposals for GM contamination, Peter Melchett, Soil Association policy director said:

"If the Government sticks to this policy, part of the Prime Minister's legacy will be to leave a GM-contaminated country behind him. The Prime Minister is promoting a technology that is well past its sell-by date."

"Back in 1999, The Soil Association had a meeting with Tony Blair to discuss GM. He said that, because he was sure that GM food would become a major part of the British economy in a few years time, he had to be in favour of it, even if the British people were against. Since then, GM crops have contributed nothing to the UK economy. More and more scientific evidence of the risk to human health posed by genetic engineering has emerged. The British people have overwhelmingly rejected GM food. It is clear that GMOs have no part to play in the future of British food and farming."

Commenting on the Government's latest failure to protect the public from pesticide spraying, Peter Melchett, Soil Association policy director said:

"It is a scandal that the Government has ignored the clear advice of the RCEP to take a 'more precautionary approach' to pesticide use, as well as the very modest recommendation for the introduction of no-spray 'buffer zones alongside residential property and other buildings such as schools, hospitals and retirement homes where people may be adversely affected by crop spray'."

"If the Government won't look after people's health by acting on the best scientific advice they have, the answer has to be a large-scale move to organic farming, and the end of all pesticide sprays in the British countryside."

A GM disaster for the UK?

In the United States, where GM crops are widely grown, the agricultural industry has lost almost all of its \$300 million annual maize export market to Europe due to widespread GM contamination. It would be reckless to repeat this economic disaster here in the UK. The Government should listen to the British public and adopt a strong non-GM policy, including the strictest controls possible on GM contamination.

The Government and the National Farmers' Union are saying that the market will determine whether GM crops are actually grown. However, the reality is that only a few farmers around the country need to grow GM crops, such as for feeding to their own animals, for farmers and consumers everywhere to suffer from this new and unnecessary burden of contamination.

Organic food at risk of contamination

The Government recognises that the "introduction of GM crops should take due account of the needs of the organic sector." However, we are appalled that Defra is clearly not committed to protecting organic food from all GM contamination. Their strong preference is for the higher 0.9% limit - if they have their way, nearly 1 in a 100 mouthfuls of organic food could actually be GM. We therefore urge the public to respond to this consultation in support of a lower limit, and asserting their right to choose GM-free organic food by demanding that the GM contamination limit for organic food should be 0.1%.

It is outrageous that the market for organic food - which has strong public support and is growing at 30% a year - is being threatened by the Government's proposals to allow GM contamination. The Soil Association believes that there should be no GM in organic food and we will work to ensure that Soil Association certified organic food remains GM-free.

The Soil Association welcomes the fact that Defra recognises that the costs of GM contamination should be "funded by the GM sector itself". Even with the strictest of controls, cases of contamination are inevitable and these will have economic impacts on organic and other non-GM farmers. The Soil Association believes that the economic cost for GM contamination should fall squarely with the GM industry and not on the shoulders of non-GM farmers and consumers and that a new statutory system will be needed to ensure that this happens.

ENDS

Notes to editors

- Defra's *Consultation on proposals for managing the coexistence of GM and non-GM crops in England*, was published on 20 July 2006. Go to www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/gmnongm-coexist/index.htm
- Also published today by Defra was *The Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution report on crop spraying and the health of residents and bystanders – Government response*. Go to www.defra.gov.uk/environment/rcep/index.htm
- The original RCEP report, *Crop Spraying and the Health of Residents and Bystanders*, was published on 22 September 2005. Go to www.rcep.org.uk/cropspraying.htm

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