

GenetiX Update

Newsletter of the Genetic Engineering Network:

INFORMATION FOR ACTION!

Autumn 1999

Number 14

direct action is not only justified...it is also very effective

We might look to the government to do things about the terrifying spread of these threats to the environment and human kind, but it has proved again and again that when faced with a choice between what the electorate wants and what big business wants, it will side with big business. We might appeal to international treaties protecting the environment, but they have been overruled by those pursuing coercive trade at any cost. If we do not take responsibility for what is happening no one else will. It is time we stopped wondering what are THEY going to do about it, and start thinking what are WE going to do about it.

George Monbiot at Watlington rally



Farm-scale trials and the Summer of Action

So who is really acting illegally and unscientifically?!

This summer frustration with the UK government's inability to respond adequately to public concerns over GM boil over into action. The focus for these protests were the seven farm-scale trials of up to 10 hectares of GM summer oilseed rape and fodder maize grown at farms all around the country.

Although presented to the general public as a four-year assessment of the environmental effects of herbicide-tolerant GM crops, Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace and Genewatch have published detailed reports illustrating how these farm-scale trials are unscientifically designed, undemocratic and how they pose an immediate threat to the environment.

From the trustees of Lushill Farm in Swindon ordering the farmer to destroy the test site in response to mass local opposition and to protect the organic status of other crops on the estate, to the crack Greenpeace action team descending at dawn on Lyng, Norfolk, direct action has taken many different forms. In all cases it has occurred only after public meetings,

letter writing, and lobbying farmers and MPs have come to no avail.

Watlington Rally and Action 18th July
In Watlington, Oxfordshire, the campaign against the farm-scale trial had been running from the moment the test plots were announced. Stalls were held in the town and an organic picnic was organised along with a walk to the site. By lucky coincidence, literally metres away from the Model Farm GM test site, lay an abandoned farm house with an overgrown garden full of wild flowers. This swiftly became the Alternative Model Farm for two weeks, with beautiful displays of permaculture and organic farming methods. Open days were held for the general public to decide which 'model' of the future they wanted.

On Sunday 18th July, a beautiful summer's day, locals mingled with campaigners and concerned individuals from all over the country at a rally addressed by Nottingham South MP, Alan Simpson; Swindon campaigner, Jean Saunders; a local food writer, Linda Brown; Jim Thomas from Greenpeace, and George Monbiot,

journalist, campaigner and all-round defender of truth and justice! At the end of the rally over 600 people, dressed in white paper decontamination suits and waving biohazard flags, large bumble-bees and banners went to symbolically surround the site. But then, like a scene out of Braveheart, they just walked through the conventional control oilseed rape onto the GM oilseed rape itself. An hour and a half later the site was almost totally destroyed. Although the crop had already pollinated, the test site was rendered scientifically useless.

As the last protestors were returning to the rally site police reinforcements, including horses fresh from a demo at Hillgrove Cat-Breeding Farm, attempted to snatch people randomly out of the crowd and scatter it with horses. A mounted policeman lifted one woman up by her hair. The ensuing chaos provided the media with pictures of 'violence', allowing them to portraying the jubilant and good-humoured crowd as an angry mob.

This provocation can only be seen as a deliberate attempt to belittle what was an

extremely empowering, significant and, above all, peaceful action - one of the biggest in the recent history of the environmental movement. For many people attending, this was the first time they had taken direct action against the genetic pollution escaping into the beautiful Oxfordshire countryside. A lasting image will be that of an eighty-year old woman, without a suit, quietly pulling up the oilseed rape.

"One of the many things that has unified the huge opposition to GE in this country has been the peaceful nature of all Genetic Events. Please do everything you can to ensure that it continues in the same peaceful vein and enjoy it"

From a leaflet distributed at the rally.

Greenpeace Action in Norfolk

The following weekend, Greenpeace activists, including its executive director Lord Melchett, decontaminated a GM maize farm-scale trial in Lyng, Norfolk. This action, in which 28 people were arrested, could have turned into a tragedy when the farmer who owned the land, William Brigham, became violent, driving a tractor into the mower which was driven onto the field to destroy the maize, as well as chasing the activists around the field. Of those arrested, only Lord Melchett was remanded, and his treatment ignited a long-awaited debate in the press regarding direct action and whether it is the action of a small unrepresentative minority who want to derail the democratic process. The government would say that, wouldn't it! Unfortunately, much of the press debate focused on 'establishment maverick' Melchett, rather than the validity of farm-scale trials or why ordinary people take action. Because the police arrived before the site was completely destroyed, the trial remains valid. No-one fancied going back to finish off the job and possibly meeting rabid farmer Brigham again!

Smash Genetix Action in Lincolnshire

As with the Greenpeace action the previous week, the Smash Genetix action was targeted at GM fodder maize. Unlike its oilseed rape, AgrEvo's GM maize already has consent to be grown in the European Union. This means that the government is under no obligation to inform the public, or other farmers or bee-keepers about where it is being grown. For this reason concerned members of the public and local agricultural producers have to play detective to find out whether their produce is at risk from contamination. Detailed research finally identified the right farm but unfortunately incorrect scientific analysis

led activists to the wrong field.

Eighty activists initially outfoxed the police, and in a well co-ordinated action destroyed a field of maize. However, two hours later, the police arrived and began rounding up activists. Some managed to get away by running along ditches and hedgerows or hiding in the undergrowth, but 46 people were arrested. All were initially charged with criminal damage, as well as conspiracy to cause criminal damage, which would have meant a jury trial. In an obviously political move the conspiracy charge was later dropped, along with all charges against 22 people. The remaining 24 have had their charges changed to the lesser charge of aggravated trespass.

This action, more than any, highlights the secrecy with which these trials are conducted. It is evident that the government supports the interests of big business over small local producers whose products may be polluted without them even knowing.



Winter Plantings of 4 farm-scale trials

Out of the eight planned GM farm-scale trials announced last October, one landowner, the Cooperative Wholesale Society, pulled out completely, one was forced to destroy his test site by his farm trustees, and three were the targets of mass civil disobedience. Bearing this opposition in mind, the government announced four winter plantings of oilseed rape, and plans for sixty more next year (oilseed rape, sugar beet and fodder maize). These plans were immediately hit by controversy. Friends of the Earth exposed the fact that the government had simply allowed AgrEvo to go ahead with planting winter oilseed rape without having submitted a new application to ACRE. Was this because they didn't want to submit it to the new reformed and less sympathetic ACRE committee?

Despite admitting that it was illegal under the terms of the EU Deliberate Release Directive - three out of the four planned trials had already been planted - they decided to allow the trials to proceed anyway, postponing the forth. As Tony Juniper, FoE's policy director said, "**The public can no longer have any confidence that the Government is neutral on the GM issue.**"

That's not all kiddies, not only are the

farm-scale trials illegal, but so are all AgrEvo's NSL winter oilseed rape trials! Not that we would encourage you in the slightest to test this out in court. NOTE that 23 out of 24 of the winter plantings are AgrEvo's

Nottingham

One of the farm-scale trials was planned for Bingham, Nottinghamshire. The farmer agreed to have a public meeting and to pull out if there was really strong local opposition. At the meeting, despite the fact that no anti-GM speakers were invited, an overwhelming majority (80:3) voted against the trial. Respecting the strong local opposition, the farmer pulled out of the farm-scale trial, but still planted a small test-site. So much for democracy in Nottinghamshire!

Current Farm-scale trials

Lincolnshire

Home Farm, Spital on the Street, Glentham
The Old Rectory, Croxby, Market Rasen

Hertfordshire

Woods Farm, Dodds Lane, Piccotts End,
Hemel Hempstead.

Around three hundred people (a third from the farming community) attended a public meeting in Market Rasen, Lincolnshire. At the end of the meeting a show of hands revealed a two thirds majority in favour of ending the GM trial. As a result of a local campaigner organising for scientists to attend a meeting, the councillors from West Lindsey District Council, which has the two farm-scale trials in its boundaries, voted unanimously to put a halt to the trials. This decision has to go to a further meeting, but could be very exciting.

The Lincolnshire campaign is desperate for help- please contact the Skegness area group if you can offer help.

An active local campaign is developing in Hemel Hempstead, with local people petitioning in town and sending a delegation to the farmer to ask him to cancel the trial. A public meeting was attended by over 85 people.

Note of caution: The government presented the news of the latest farm-scale trials almost as though they were courting more direct action. In many media reports government officials happily stated that the security on the sites would not be tightened. However, there seems to be another agenda. Biotechnology companies are evidently pushing for the trials to take place secretly, and action on these sites would give the government a perfect excuse for this, despite the fact that it would directly contravene EU law. But hey, when has the UK government ever bothered about a thing like that!



Comment

At the recent gathering for grassroots genetics campaigners, Dr Sue Mayer of Genewatch UK, said that she was beginning to think that the genetics campaign is riding on the crest of an unimaginable victory. As well as the work done by the big national campaigning organisations, the grassroots campaign has played a significant part in moving the issue forwards. From holding a GM info stall in a town centre, to permaculture crop squats, the decontamination of 50 trial sites this year alone, and the chopping down of AstraZeneca's GM poplar trees, people are refusing to be bullied by the government and the biotech industry. This summer has seen an unprecedented amount of diverse, inventive and exciting actions, many of which have moved beyond the consumer choice

issue to illustrate how genetic engineering, be it in crops, cotton, trees, humans or animals, represents a vision of the future that many of us refuse to accept.

To help support this network of grassroots campaigners in the most sustainable way, the Genetic Engineering Network is seeking to decentralise many of the tasks that were previously being taken on from an office in London. The Totnes group in South Devon has taken on the co-ordination of the Genetix Update. We hope to ensure that the Update remains a useful campaigning tool, as well as keeping people inspired by reporting news of actions. Please please send us your news, your feedback and any financial contributions!!!

Happy gardening!

The Totnes Genetix Update Collective

A Poem from the Laboratory

The tigers are on opium, The sloths are taking speed - It's time to give to nature The things we know she needs.

It's great to see such progress, Though babies are left on shelves, And it's painful to observe The insects being themselves....

But the eagles are eating cress And my panthers are sucking lime- All the planning'll be worthwhile, We'll get it right this time.

The giraffes are hilarious on acid - The chimps are funny on dope - If it wasn't for all the fun we have It might be hard to cope

But brains were meant to function And our minds are made for work: If you bang my knee just here... You see?! It gave a jerk!

We need to measure your life In the conditions of the lab And then we can transform you - You'll run quicker than a crab!

Oh my work is so exciting -I'm high on genetics, you see -I've nicked a couple of poetry genes And this is a poem - by me !!!

Philip Wells (the Fire Poet) has performed everywhere from Westminster Abbey to The Brixton Fridge: book him now for your school/gig/protest/bash! 0181 566 3791



A roundup™ of the Summer's local and national actions

The Seeds of Resistance have germinated!

The Seeds of Resistance Gathering, held alongside the World Seed Conference in Cambridge in early September, was a chance for GM campaigners and small-scale organic growers and gardeners to get together and share a vision of the future, where seeds are not doused in chemicals and have their DNA tampered with, in which seed biodiversity is not threatened, and in which food production is not controlled by a few corporations.

Day one consisted of inspiring workshops and talks, including one from Mary of the Henry Doubleday Research Association on the rewards of planting and saving heritage seeds on her allotment. Day two was spent planning actions for the World Seed Conference. That evening thirteen activists visited the conference delegates at a posh dinner in a country house. They entered with the cry "Ladies and gentleman, we are here to SAVE THE SEED!". Cutlery dropped, and there was even some applause as one woman got up on the central table to explain why they were there. Activists carrying spray bottles and water pistols with "Roundup" labels asked diners:

"Would you like some Roundup with your meal?".

Most declined but were told "well neither do we - but we have no choice", before having the remains of their meal sprayed with harmless salt-water. Most delegates seemed quite amused. On day three, activists went to the delegates' lunch venue and set up a cage with a 'prisoner' inside handing out 'illegal' seeds (i.e. old seed varieties that do not have commercial value, for a penny a packet.) Another group went into the conference and took over a workshop about 'privatising the seed'. Delegates were treated to a song challenging seed privatisation and a rant on the wrongs of Plant Breeders. This was greeted by applause from the delegates as well as heckling. After the activists had been ejected, some delegates invited people back in for coffee and further discussion!

Ring a Roses Action

Xenotransplantation Concern held the world's largest 'Ring a Roses' on 24th July in Cambridge to highlight this issue. Around 400 people attended to break this record.

Trees Action and Forest Biotech 99 Conference, Oxford

The campaign against GE in forestry kicked off the week of the Forest Biotech 99 conference, with news that AstraZeneca's plantation of GM poplar trees had been

felled and ring-barked by eco-lumberjacks. These trees have a reduced lignin content which the industry claims, in typical greenwash language, means there will be less pollution from pulp processing. Truly environmental solutions would be more recycling, less paper use, and diversifying our source materials, for example, using hemp. Whilst this attack has undoubtedly put back research, AstraZeneca claims that 48 of the trees were mature enough to pulp for paper making. A demonstration also took place outside the conference during the week, with the beautiful old tree outside being dressed and turned into a wishing tree.

GenetiX Snowball break their injunctions

On 5th August three members from GenetiX Snowball openly and accountably trashed an AgrEvo test site, breaking an injunction served against them. They took the bagged up crops to AgrEvo's HQ in Norfolk where the staff were totally phased, despite the fact that they had been sent a letter saying they were going to break their injunctions. At an impromptu press conference AgrEvo claimed that Snowball had the wrong site, until a journalist pointed out the injunction signs surrounding it. Finally they were allowed to hand in the bag of GM oilseed rape and their statements and injunctions. Over two months later they are

still awaiting their committal papers!!

Other local actions and events

Scotland - Scottish Genetix Action report that on Saturday 24th July, in a simultaneous action, GM oilseed rape test sites in Edinburgh and Aberdeen were destroyed. Scottish Genetix Action will continue to campaign for a GMO-free Scotland. **Totnes** - a regional networking and information-sharing meeting for the South West was held in Totnes in Devon. Over 50 people attended from local groups. **Sheffield** - Tesco actions: the manager told them they would never have their own way, and then five days later Tesco announced that its own brands would be GM free. Both the **Kingsbridge** and **Hartland** groups in Devon entered GM-themed floats for their local carnivals, and both won third prize. The Hartland group has been especially busy with a newsletter, four Greenpeace supermarket tours, lots of letters in the press, stalls at agricultural shows, and setting up a local food certification scheme. In **Marlborough**, the COalition against Genetics (COG) has also been busy challenging industrial agriculture, setting up a local farmer's market with a GE stall. **Aberystwyth Action against Genetics** has been hassling Chris Pollock of the Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research, which is a government institution partly funded by AgrEvo based in Aberystwyth. Despite this corporate funding, he is considered an 'independent' advisor to the Government on farm-scale trials.

Parish Polls on GM

Over the summer two parish polls took place in different parts of the country in which local people were asked whether they agreed that no crop testing should take place in the area, and whether the council should actively work to remove GM food from its shops, restaurants and institutions. The result in **Tavistock**, Devon, was 89% in favour. The result in **Chinnor**, Oxfordshire, was 85%.

ToGG in **Totnes** avoided the paperwork and cost of a full parish poll by calling upon local businesses to petition the council to adopt the Five-Year Freeze. Over 120 businesses and community groups in a town of 8,000 people supported the resolution, and as a result, Totnes Council is the first town council to sign up to the Five Year Freeze. ToGG worked to find the most legally binding wording for a town council. This is available from ToGG.

In **Lincolnshire**, the proposed 90 referenda are on hold whilst they check out the legality of the votes. Four will almost definitely go ahead in the parishes where the farm scale trials are and in neighbouring parishes. For more information on how to conduct a parish poll contact South Yorkshire GEN or Mark Thomas (the Mark Thomas) at Vera Productions 0171 436 6116.

The Eugenics Society AGM

"Soon it will be a sin of parents to have a child that carries the heavy burden of genetic disease. We are entering a world where we need to consider the quality of our children."

Robert Edwards, eugenicist

A conference of the Galton Institute, formerly known as the Eugenics Society, was interrupted by protesters from 'People Against Eugenics' concerned at the racist and genocidal tendencies of the Institute's members. After a discussion with the venue owners, the Royal Zoological Society, to prevent further meetings being held there, activists left the building.

Eugenics is the programme of improving the human race by controlling which genes are transmitted to the next generation. In the past this was done by forced sterilisation, often of people with learning difficulties, and led to thousands of disabled people and millions of Jewish people being murdered in the 1930s and 1940s. Among the charming speakers at this event were Prof. Glayde Whitney, who wrote the forward to a book by a former leader of the Ku Klux Klan, which claims a Jewish/Black conspiracy against white Americans. Another speaker, Prof. Richard Lynn, had this to say "Blacks have a lower IQ than whites and part of the reason for this is genetic." He claims that this is the reason for Africa's low level of economic development as well as claiming that "blacks have high levels of testosterone that makes males aggressive and this probably contributes to their high crime rate".



Campaigners outside the Forest Biotech '99 Conference in Oxford

People Against Eugenics is supported by the Disabled Action Network, the Genetic Engineering Network, the Jewish Socialist Group, and the National Assembly Against Racism. For more information contact the Campaign Against Human Genetic Engineering or GenEthics News.

A hundred cows and fifty chickens
march on Labour Party Conference,
Bournemouth.

"I don't believe that there is a third way between GM and non-GM foods. The Cabinet has to take a choice - whose side is it on?" Tony Benn MP at the Bournemouth rally.

To the strains of 'Ol' Monsanto had a Farm' and a pre-prepared dance routine, a procession of farmyard animals, salmon and a giant caterpillar trotted on the Labour Party Conference in Bournemouth, to demand their right not to eat GM animal feed. This good-natured protest, accompanied by a large police presence, was perhaps the most surreal anti-GM action in this country so far. The animals moored and clucked in approval as they were addressed by anti-GM speakers, including Tony Benn MP, and treated to a play on the evils of Monsanto. A petition of 17,000 signatures was presented to the government along with a statement from the World Union of Concerned Scientists calling for a five-year moratorium on the growing and selling of GM crops. Inside the Conference, Tony Blah told a question and answer session that on the issue of GM food and animal feed, the government's only priority was to do the right thing, 'even if it is not the most popular thing to do'. Grunt!

New National Campaigns

Women say No to GMOs

This new initiative was launched by Paul McCartney (!) To sign their petition and find out more <http://www.organicsdirect.co.uk/gm>

The Wholesome Food Association

Set up by a group in Hartland, North Devon, this exciting new certification scheme aims to promote food grown locally by small-scale growers without the use of pesticides. For more information email: phil@wfa.org.uk or check <http://www.wfa.org.uk>.

GM registration scheme

Genetix Food Alert (GFA) has launched a GM-free symbol licence. Retailers, manufacturers, restaurants, cafes and wholesalers who are members will use suppliers approved by GFA standards to be 'GM-free'. GFA is looking for volunteers to monitor stores around the country, help with administration and possibly run a parallel non-food product scheme for cotton and wood gfa@rjvint.globalnet.co.uk

Genetics Campaigners Gathering

In mid-September, campaigners from around the country converged on Devon to spend four days reflecting on the campaign so far and to prepare for the future. The hectic pace of events over the past year has left little time to pause and consider together, so this event was conceived entirely for that purpose. The tail-end of hurricane Floyd threatened to wash us down to the sea, but the marquees, tipis domes, tents and yurts withstood the gales, and the national gathering of genetics activists survived and flourished.

The gathering began with a plea for us all to stop and recognise the giant strides we have made so far in this campaign against all the political and economic odds. Along with strategy and information sessions, participants took time to consider how we can all work together and celebrate difference within a diverse campaign. We looked too at how we each personally relate to the issue and how we deal with our own despair and disempowerment. Numbers were limited to campaigners working full-time on GE: apologies to those who could not make it due to this limit. This was primarily so that we could make progress and avoid getting terminally bogged down in overcrowded meetings, but also for practical reasons like the size of the site, as well as for security. And it seemed to work. The weekend was peppered with informative and useful workshops on areas such as GE trees and cotton; gmos in animal feed; AgrEvo; animal and human genetic engineering. All the sessions were strongly focused on practical strategy, and resulted in varied and exciting ideas for action. We discussed the government's attempts to restrict and manage the public debate, the dangers of government and corporate spin and greenwash, and how to recognise and counter them. There were presentations on the anti-GM campaigns bubbling up all around the world, and we considered ways of strengthening the international network. We devoted a major session to tackling those unaccountable patent police, the World Trade Organisation. At a more local and personal level, the workshop on local genetics campaign groups, was an exciting session for information-sharing and trouble-shooting. A help sheet for local groups is developing from this meeting.

Set in a long, lush pasture bisected by a brook, bordered by ancient oak-woods and a stone's throw from the river, the place served to remind us all why we are working against genetic engineering. Living a positive alternative for a few days, closer to nature, also helped realise the gathering's intention of bringing more heart into what can be an arid, cerebral issue. It was rejuvenating and calming to watch the autumn coming on in the woods, and hear the acorns rattling down from the trees.

Burnout is a perpetual problem among campaigners, and so a major theme of the gathering was how we can sustain ourselves through a long-term campaign; various forms of healing was available for frazzled activists on the verge of crash and burn.

By Sunday, the sun had finally appeared and Northern campaigners took on the Southerners in a team-building game-cum-free-for-all. As darkness drew on, people from around the country who had previously only know each other by email and phone, were becoming firm friends around the camp-fire, in the hot-tubs and the cold stream. **A note to corporate readers:** there may be more money in the biotech industry, but I am certain we have more fun!

The gathering closed with a flurry of mammoth strategy sessions (congratulations to everybody who lasted to the end). One attendee reported, "I came out of the final strategy session focussed and aware of who people were, what they were up to, and how to contribute to the different areas discussed in workshops".

It was a challenge to bring all strands of the campaign together; mainstream non-governmental organisations and radical activists, local grassroots community groups, lone letter-writers and national and international campaigners. However, the risk paid off spectacularly. The last word goes to a local group representative who arrived slightly apprehensive of what she might have let herself in for:

"By the third day I was wondering how I could ever have been so worried about it all. I felt privileged to share four days with genuinely passionate, warm people, different people, journalists, scientists, activists and housewives like me. People with the courage of their convictions. It inspires me most because I know that whatever I do, as an individual or as part of a group, we are making changes, moving mountains. We need the kind of inspiration that came from this gathering to drive us on with this cause. I felt lucky to be a part of it".

The gathering was organised entirely voluntarily; a big, big thank you to all the many people who contributed their time or lent their belongings, as well as Kebele Kafé whose volunteers conjured up beautiful vegan organic food and perpetual tea.

International Actions

The USA Campaign Kicks off
It must be very exciting to be an anti-GM campaigner in the US right now. Looking at the success of the campaign in Europe, they must know they are onto a winner! Until now the silence of the American public has enabled US officials to say that US citizens

have accepted GM and that they trust the regulatory system. The truth is that since 1992 the Food and Drug Administration has given blanket approval for all GM foods over the objection of agency scientists, and as a result there has been no independent safety testing and no labelling. The American public simply didn't know what was going on with their food and in their farms.

However, with consumer concerns spilling over from Europe and international markets shutting US farmers out, the findings earlier this year that Bt corn pollen could threaten the Monarch butterfly sounded the alarm and suddenly there was a campaign in full swing. Forty religious, farm-owning, environmental and other activist groups in the US met in San Francisco over the summer to plan a campaign of lobbying Congress and state legislatures for the testing and labelling of GMOs, as well as publicly questioning the environmental and health effects. In August Greenpeace wrote to 50 food companies to ask whether their products had been genetically modified, prompting Gerber and Heinz to say they would not use GM ingredients in their baby foods. The Centre for Food Safety, leading scientists, religious leaders and consumers await the result of a lawsuit filed against the FDA for their blanket approval policy on GM food.

An extremely well-organised direct action movement is also springing up all over the US. An e-mail action news information service 'Genetix Alert' has reported on decontaminations around the country, and the Bioengineering Action Network in Eugene, Oregon, runs a grassroots activist email listserve. Direct action groups include the Minnesota Bolt Weevils, Reclaim the Seeds, Future Farmers, the Cropatistas, the Lodi Loppers and the California Croppers all in California, and the Seeds of Resistance in Maine. In one of the thirteen crop actions that have happened over the last few months, the Minnesota Bolt Weevils trampled 50 rows of Pioneer Hi-Bred research corn, damaged vehicles, spray-painted 'free the seed', 'stop agri-business', and changed the Pioneer sign in front of the facility to read 'Pioneering Farmageddon'. Southern California is really hotting up with supermarket actions, student groups setting up and cities declaring themselves GE-free zones. Two British campaigners, Luke Anderson and Mae-Wan Ho are going out to give talks there at the end of October.

Groups all around the USA have called for a Day (and Night) of Action on 27th October. Above ground groups and covert direct action 'gardening' groups are planning to make their presence felt. This incidentally coincides with some days of action planned in Canada, as well as the Days of Action against Animal Feed in the UK. Our resistance will be as transnational as capital!! For more information on the US campaign try <http://www.tao.ca/~ban/ar.htm> and Splice,

New resources available Contact details at back

Norfolk Genetic Information Network New pages on their web-site: AgrEvo - public enemy no.1 - info and links specific to AgrEvo. Professor Bullshit, bogus research, false report and spindoctoring by pro-GM science community. **The Women's Environmental Network** *The Gene Files: action and resource pack* covers a wide range of issues including food and health, trees, crops and farming, genetic pollution and the environment, multinationals, democracy, risks and regulations, and the patenting of life. There are sections on local campaigning, letter writing, actions and events, working with the media, as well as useful addresses, further reading and other recent articles. **genetiX snowball** Snowball list of deliberate releases in Winter 1999. Call DETR Biotech Unit (0171- 890-5277) for 6-figure grid references (ask them to tell you why they are not published in the GMO register) Available soon: a briefing for local campaigning on GM cotton. **Corporate Watch** AgrEvo briefing, Animal Feed briefing. Other briefings on Biotech companies will be forthcoming. **Cornerhouse** Briefing 16: Cloning, Genetics, Health. It will also be available by email for free. Email cornerhouse@gn.apc.org **The Soil Association** briefing on cross-pollination called 'Sting in the Tail' **Local Groups briefing** Ideas to keep you and your group excited. This developed from a workshop at the Gathering. Contact ToGG for details. **GMO campaign** Campaign pack for Animal Feed **The Lancet Saturday 6th October vol 354 no. 8387** Read Dr Puzstai's research and see what the Government and industry scientists were so keen to cover up. Also information about some other research that looks at the health implications of GE food. **Nature Thursday 7 October vol. 401 pp.525-526** Find out just how unscientific, politically and commercially motivated the current system of assessing the health risks of GM foods is by reading this excellent report by Sue Mayer, Eric Millstone and Eric Brunner on Substantial Equivalence. **Monsanto's Law CD** Calypso artist Alexander D. Great, who recently performed at the Greenpeace Organic Picnic, has released this catchy CD. He is also available to perform live. To get a copy of the CD or contact him contact 0181 974 9051 or alexgreat@cableinet.co.uk **Institute of Directors report 'Seeds of Discontent'** Biotechnology is vital to business success, and those 'self-appointed guardians of the environment' who are uprooting crops are also endangering the growth of business itself. Report available from their Press Office. **Deutschebank report 'GMOs are dead'** Available on www.dmg.com/central/ver40/index.html

vol. 5, issue 6.

Diary dates

November

8 'Nanotechnology: how small can we get? If you thought GM was scary, wait till you hear what the Biotech companies have in the pipeline next!! At the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London. (Incidentally, the ICA has links with the anti-environmentalist group, Living Marxism)

8 or 9 9am at the Royal Courts of Justice, London. Support a fair hearing for genetiX snowball. Confirm date on 0161- 834-0295.

14-16 Agbiotech 99: Biotechnology and World Agriculture London, UK
email: info@bioedge.net

<<http://www.bioedge.net/agbiotech.html>>

17 The Government Food Advisory Committee is holding a consultation day in Bath on labelling. Contact FAC Secretariat on 0171 238 6268.

30th - 3rd December- WTO Third Ministerial Conference in Seattle, USA

December

6 Two concerned members of the public are being charged with theft and handling stolen goods after 96 items of food containing GMOs were peacefully removed from Camden Town Sainsbury's. To support them be at Snaresbrook Crown Court, East London at 10am.

7 The launch of 'Primal Seeds' a network for organic farmers, breeders, gardeners, activists and those who hold the future of biodiversity. Contact 0161 224 4846 or www.primalseeds.org

13- 14 GM foods: the way forward (industry conference) Forum Hotel, 97 Cromwell Rd SW7. 01483 570099.

Global Power Local Promise



AgrEvo

Bringing Genetic Engineering To A Field Near You!

Forget Monsanto, BST and the terminator gene. One company is currently planning to spread genetic pollution in the UK on an unprecedented scale. Its name? AgrEvo.

This winter, all but one of the release sites, including the farm-scale trials, belong to AgrEvo. They were also behind the farm-scale trials opposed this summer. AgrEvo is expanding these to 60 sites next year - putting an area the size of Southampton under GM crops, and threatening to contaminate a huge amount of non-GM crops.

At the recent gathering of anti-GM activists, AgrEvo was identified as a key target. They will focus on field sites, offices and on persuading investors to invest elsewhere.

Later this year, Hoescht, AgrEvo's parent company, is merging with Rhone-Poulenc. It will be renamed Aventis CropScience, and will be owned by Aventis which will be the world's biggest 'life sciences' company. With annual sales of £12 billion, it will tower over other biotech companies.

See resource list for how to obtain AgrEvo briefing and test-site locations. Also check <http://members.tripod.com/~ngin/agrevodiary.htm> to read a Norfolk women's experience of the UK's public enemy no.1.

World Trample Organisation

"The EU has frozen the approval process, and it needs to be thawed."

Gus Schumacher, USDA

If you haven't grasped the importance of challenging the third Ministerial Conference of the WTO in Seattle (30th November to 3rd December) read on.

The WTO governs the world trading system. It is currently pushing a policy of free market liberalisation, which basically means that it ensures that national markets are open to international trade. This free market ultimately favours the financial interests of Multinational Corporations over the rights of individual states, regions, local areas and individuals to promote sustainable societies, protect their environment, protect the health and wellbeing of individuals and make their own choice to reject genetic engineering. The WTO considers the free flow of trade more important than these. According to the US government, US farmers have expressed increasing frustration over the EU's virtual moratorium on new approvals until 2002 on new GM

varieties. US corn farmers claim they have lost \$200 million in annual sales. They claim that both the EU's lack of approvals, and its labelling legislation on soya and maize protein, amount to a barrier to trade.

The WTO could force the UK government to grow and import GM food and crops or else face punitive US trade sanctions. Furthermore, another agreement that is being re-negotiated in Seattle, Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), could force countries to adopt US-style patents on life. This could seriously effect food security in the South, where poor farmers will have to pay corporations who are holding the patents on seeds that they have used for generations.

The Government has already used the possibility of a WTO challenge as an excuse for not imposing a moratorium on commercial plantings of GM crops. **If our Government really represents public opinion, it must challenge the WTO, the US and corporate power.** You can write to Richard Caborne, Minister of trade and join [the global day of action on November 30th](http://www.agp.org). For letter writing: Christian Aid or World Development Movement. For day of action try People's Global Action against Free Trade and the WTO on <http://www.agp.org>.

An Activist Talks! Seb has been out sharing his concerns about GE with the general public

Monday so it must be Honiton, talking to clients and carers from a branch of the social services. After I've finished, one carer says, "Well, I didn't know anything about this before you started talking but I feel like I know a lot more now. Its really scary, isn't it?". I leave them all about to sit down together and write letters to this intransigent government. To have made that sort of impact is a real high, and I leave feeling lighter and happier than when I arrived.

Tuesday Middle-aged, middle-class, Middle-England is my audience tonight, at a branch of the National Women's Register. The struggle is always to cover all the issues without rattling on all night, and still leave time to celebrate the gains the campaign has made, give a glimpse of the positive alternatives, and empower people to take action themselves. It is a tall order to shoehorn all this, along with questions, comments, and the inevitable red herrings and digressions, into an hour. If I leave people feeling alarmed, yet depressed and hopeless, it may do more harm than good. Fortunately, tonight's women are not easily cowed, but are outraged. "It's disgraceful! Its all about money!".

Wednesday Head to head with two scientists in a public debate. Even armed with the facts and my convictions, its hard not to feel intimidated by scientists, with their 'rationality', condescension and impenetrable lingo. It seems clear why as a society we are timidly in thrall to them. My opponents tonight are urbane, smoothly reassuring, and dead from the neck down. I am reminded, as the debate wears on, that for all the power and money wielded by the biotech industry, they can never contrive the passion and heartfelt commitment that is present in our campaign, which can touch people far more deeply than the measured tones of corporate science. My scientists wriggle and squirm pleasingly when asked by the audience whether they receive any funding from the biotech industry, and fall back on the cheap emotional tug of Third World hunger. We win the debate comfortably.

Thursday Halfway through my talk to 6th form general studies students there are no visible signs of life out there, save for some theatrical yawning over to my right. Eventually one droopy youth says, "Look, I think what you're saying is really good, and I agree with you, but nothing's going to really change is it?". I'm depressed to find how disempowered even this age group is; wearily sceptical about the prospects for change. I come across this sentiment day after day; resigned apathy is a more dangerous enemy than Monsanto or AgrEvo. I want to tell them that they are far more powerful individually than they think they are; that its only their own feelings of impotence that stops them making a difference. So I do. Then we look at what they can do, from writing letters and talking to friends, to spectacular actions at corporate offices and AGMs. By the end the room is buzzing and the students are excitedly exclaiming, "I want to go and do a protest!".

These talks have covered a varied cross-section of the population. The overall impression I've gained is that even now after so much publicity, **most people have only the vaguest grasp of the issues and implications.** There is a huge appetite for information among the public though, and talks are a superbly immediate and accessible way of conveying it. So read up, memorise a few facts, figures and quotes, find an audience, be brave, and take the plunge. Seb is available for talks, street performance, rallies, weddings, barnmizvahs etc.



What are Monsanto up to!?

We forgot to listen our confidence in biotechnology has been widely seen as arrogance and condescension . Robert Shapiro, CEO Monsanto Company

I emerged from the meeting with a very clear impression that they are prepared to rethink their position fundamentally out of an awareness that Europe has said no to genetic engineering and perhaps a fear that the North American public might follow suit

Patrick Holden, The Soil Association.

Having spent some time licking their wounds after their last charm offensive backfired, Monsanto are back, and their new PR strategy of 'really listening to the public's concerns' (what they call 'stakeholder dialogue') is winning over the media and even some NGOs.

Over the summer, Monsanto lay low, allowing AgrEvo, to take the flak over GM. Far from their usual bullishness in court, Monsanto failed to push for the prosecution of three members of Cereals '99 Snowball for what could easily have been seen as an injunction break resulting in a mandatory prison sentence, even failing to ask for costs. This was followed by news reports of internal disputes among senior officials over whether to continue planting in the UK. These rumours were dispelled and it became obvious that Monsanto were on the offensive.

In mid-September two Sunday newspapers carried very different Monsanto articles. The National Press immediately picked up one story: the first bit of good publicity for Monsanto, possibly ever. The implication was that Monsanto was considering abandoning genetic engineering and using its detailed knowledge of plant DNA to help traditional and organic plant breeders develop better hybrids.

This revelation emerged from 'stakeholder dialogue' between Monsanto and four consumer and environmental associations. Most remarkable about this dialogue was Monsanto's response. Patrick Holden of the Soil Association said that they were 'personally affected' by what they heard. Charles Secrett of Friends of the Earth, said 'they were wanting to learn ... You could see closed minds beginning to open.'

One can't help but be cynical about Monsanto's interest in helping organic farming. In the US, they are destroying organic farming through genetic contamination, and the promotion of Bt maize and cotton, which has already been promoting resistance to Bt spray, an organic pesticide. Furthermore, Monsanto's genuine desire to be perceived in the British media as a 'caring sharing corporation' does not sit well with the other under-reported story that emerged that day: Monsanto's rapid acquisition of water companies in Mexico and India. Its nice to see that Monsanto cares so much about organic farmers in Britain, whilst making a guaranteed profit from the water crisis in the South.

'Stakeholder dialogue' with the Rockefeller Foundation (whose remit is to help the world's disadvantaged), was again apparently at the heart of Monsanto's announcement to stop work on the 'terminator' gene. This controversial technology, which 'sterilises' the seeds, would have terrible effects on subsistence farmers in the South who cannot afford to keep buying seeds, as well as destroying age-old traditions of seed-saving.

Whilst this is a victory for the anti-GM campaign, we must be wary at Monsanto's assertion that it was suddenly struck by the immorality of 'terminator technology'. Not to see it as a strategic move to quiet the public outcry, and to pacify the Development NGOs, would surely be naïve considering the facts. Monsanto are still developing other so-called 'traitor' technologies and have repeated their commitment to do so. They still prohibit the replanting of seeds by farmers through contracts fiercely enforced through private investigators and the courts, and they have not retracted their declared aim of achieving ownership of the entire food chain.

Behind this aggressive repentance and soul bearing, are two classic PR strategies. The first, the Machiavellian 'divide and rule', poses a serious threat to the exciting and diverse alliance of NGO's and campaigning groups that has come together to challenge GM technology. By offering concessions to individual groups, their particular fears be they consumer choice, organic farming

practices or 'the Third World' can be allayed, and the alliance will come apart.

The second strategy is summed up by Tony Coombes, Monsanto's UK corporate affairs spokesman 'we realise that our success ... depends on the way our company and our products are perceived'. By offering constructive dialogue Monsanto is attempting to capture the moral high ground and also to find a way of dealing with more radical groups. They know that no concessions would buy off the groups fail to see biotechnology as a substitute for social change. As Monsanto appease the 'single issue' groups, the general public will be reassured that Monsanto ain't so bad after all. Any further opposition to GE would be 'radical', 'extreme' and 'unreasonable'.

As a united coalition we have put Monsanto on the defensive- itself a considerable achievement. But don't be fooled, the biotech industry has too much invested in GE to simply back down. Be aware that despite 'listening to our concerns' Tony Coombes, issued a statement on 1st October announcing that 'Monsanto has no intention of abandoning its global commitment to modern biotechnology as a safe, sustainable aid to the future of agricultural production'. Also be aware that despite listening to concerns in the UK, Monsanto are still as bold and brash as ever in the US. Only last week, they opened a new exhibit at Epcot, Walt Disney World to trumpet the wonders of plant biotechnology. United we have a real chance to make a difference; divided we fall.

Bearing this in mind, it looks like Monsanto has been coaching the British government in PR!

As Mo Mowlam wades into GM debate, taking over in Cabinet from Jack Cunningham, she can bring her negotiation skills to the proposed 'peace talks' between anti-GM campaigners, industry and government.

The government has employed The Environment Council, the same firm used by Monsanto for its recent 'stakeholder dialogues', to oversee the talks. The Council is a charity that specialises in dialogue between warring parties over controversial green issues. They plan to hold delicate exploratory talks with the aim of arranging a large-scale meeting in the spring.

The Council has made it clear to the Government that this will be a very different process from what has gone before. It has said that the new dialogue is designed to find common ground for the basis of a different way of making decisions, in which opposing parties define the problem, reach agreement, and then implement the solution, rather than the Government making a decision, announcing it, and then having to defend it.

Steve Robinson of the Environment Council, "We cannot create peace. It is up

Random news roundupTM

September saw the publication of the Deutsche Bank report in which the financial analysts of the most powerful bank in Europe warned investors to get out of GE. It was apparent to them that the public's hostility to GE might make long-term, high profit investment in biotech a disaster.

Axis Genetics appears to be one casualty of the bank's remarks and by mid-October, headlines revealed another, "Monsanto pressured to sell of GM assets" (yeeha!). As share prices plummet on Wall St, the board is reportedly considering selling off their agrochemicals business, currently valued at nothing!.

Kids beware as charity patents conkers
The South has 90% of the world's biological resources but developed countries hold 97% of all patents. International development charity Action Aid has applied for a patent on conkers. Called "Conk 1" it covers the hardening of conkers, the hardened conkers, conkers grown from hardened conkers, and any 'functional equivalent', i.e. those conkers that are hard but have not been through any patented process!

Action Aid is highlighting proposed new global trade laws that would allow companies to patent life forms, the 'Patents on Life' directive. If successful, the charity would theoretically be able to charge children for playing the game, depriving people of rights they have always taken for granted. Whereas Action Aid will not enforce its rights to payment, biotech companies around the world tend to be far less generous.

Transgenic Art

Check out this essay by an artist and university professor who wants to create a transgenic dog with fluorescent green hair, to illustrate how man has changed many plants and animals through selective breeding. It is

actually much more wacky than this.
<http://www.ekac.org/transgenic.html>

Pro-GM play 'Sweet as you are'

This play, commissioned by the pro-GM John Innes Centre and the Teacher Scientist Network (based at the Centre) will be touring schools next year. Hopefully by then school kids will be clever enough to see through the blatant propaganda. The GM campaigner looks ridiculous, behaves deviously, has no proper arguments against GM and loses the girl. His fiance listens to the rational scientist and furthers her career by promoting GM foods.

Buzz off!

It's official! Bees fly further than 50 metres from their hives. Scientists in Watlington, Oxfordshire, found GM oilseed rape pollen in hives up to four and a half kilometres from the official farm-scale trial site.

Have a bit of fun!

As of September, all restaurants, pubs and canteens are required by law to identify dishes containing GM ingredients.

****Action Alert on contamination levels****
GM-Free? The EC is proposing that food containing up to one 1% contamination will not have to be labelled, even though most supermarkets are working on a 0.1% contamination threshold. We have a month to put pressure on European Governments before the European Parliament and Council of Ministers vote on it.

International News: Over the Coals

The world's largest life science companies and grain processors face a multi-billion dollar antitrust action to be launched in up to 30 countries later this year. The unprecedented lawsuits will claim that companies such as Monsanto, DuPont and Novartis are exploiting bioengineering techniques to gain a stranglehold on agricultural markets.

The action is being brought jointly by the Washington-based Foundation on Economic Trend and the US-based National Family Farm Coalition, together with farming groups around the world. It will be the biggest antitrust suit ever brought, with the possible exception of that against Microsoft. "It has literally global implications," said Michael Hausfeld of Cohen Milstein Hausfeld and Toll, one of the 20 US law firms that have agreed to take the cases on a 'no-win no-fee' basis.

Statistics for 1999

Three countries grew almost all of the world's commercially produced transgenic crops. Australia, South Africa, Mexico, Spain, France, Portugal, Romania, Ukraine together account for a fraction of 1%. Canada 10% Argentina 17% China 1% U.S. 72%

Four crops made up almost all of the transgenic harvests. Potatoes, squash and papayas accounted for less than 1 % combined. Soybean 54% Corn 28% Canola (rape-seed) 9% Cotton 9%

NOTE: Numbers rounded SOURCES: International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-Biotech Applications, World Watch Institute.

In fact, these statistics may be wrong, as unsubstantiated reports from China suggest millions of acres may be under transgenic crops, more than the others combined. This will be compounded now that transgenic rice is ready for large-scale production.

Last bit of news!

Over 50 GM trial sites were destroyed this year alone. Most of those targeted were National Seed Listing (NSL) trials, run purely for pushing forward commercialisation. 24 winter plantings are currently in the ground. We are not suggesting that anyone takes action inspired by this information. Tony Blair thinks its wrong, and if that's the case, that's good enough for us!

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Pumpkin Planter at the Alternative Model Farm