



GREENPEACE



Soil Association

The Hon David Cameron
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
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10 March 2014

Dear Prime Minister

Commercial cultivation of RoundUp Ready GM crops in England

We write regarding the position adopted by the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs at the EU Environment Council on 3rd March, at which he supported a proposal which would fast-track the commercial planting of GM crops in countries such as England whose Governments are taking a pro-GM approach.

We are concerned that this position could lead to the commercial planting of Monsanto's RoundUp Ready GM maize NK603 or Syngenta's GM maize GA21 (which is also tolerant to RoundUp) in England as early as Spring 2015. Monsanto has not withdrawn its application to plant NK603 in the EU, despite announcing in July 2013 that it would do so.¹

Herbicide tolerant crops such as NK603 and GA21 are those most likely to be planted if commercial cultivation is allowed in England. These crops are genetically engineered to withstand blanket spraying with weedkillers such as glyphosate (brand name RoundUp). Other crops in the pipeline for approval are resistant to the European corn borer and are unsuitable for growing in the UK as this pest is not a problem here.

Plans to grow herbicide-tolerant GM crops commercially in the UK were abandoned in 2004, following the Farm Scale Evaluations (FSEs), which showed that blanket spraying with weedkillers destroys important habitats for birds, butterflies and other wildlife.² These concerns have been borne out in reality in the United States, where widespread planting of RoundUp Ready crops has led to a drastic decline in numbers of the iconic Monarch butterfly, due to the destruction of the milkweed habitat where they lay their eggs.³ 'Superweeds' which have evolved resistance to RoundUp are now adversely affecting half of US farms surveyed in 2013, leading to major economic and environmental problems as spraying with other more toxic weedkillers has increased in response.⁴ Monopoly control over the seed supply, which is patented, has also led to major seed price hikes for farmers.

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If GM crops are grown in England, this will pose major problems for conventional and organic farmers who are likely to be forced to pay the costs of segregation and certification of their crops as GM-free in order to access more lucrative GM-free markets.⁵ Contamination incidents can be caused by inadvertent mixing of crops or seeds anywhere along the supply chain, or by spread of seeds by birds or pollen on the wind. Such incidents have cost hundreds of millions of dollars in lost markets when they have occurred in other countries.

Please consider the serious implications for British wildlife and farmers' livelihoods of planting RoundUp Ready GM crops. The existing evidence base shows that herbicide-tolerant crops cause environmental harm which should be avoided. There is an urgent need to strengthen the risk assessment and approvals process for GM crops to prevent environmental harm, not to fast-track commercial plantings.

We urge you to reconsider the position adopted by Owen Paterson at the Environment Council on 3rd March and withdraw the UK Government's support for this flawed proposal.

We would be happy to meet with you to discuss this issue further.

Yours faithfully

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¹ Monsanto begins GM seeds retreat in EU. Farmers Weekly. 3rd September 2013.

<http://www.fwi.co.uk/articles/03/09/2013/140876/monsanto-begins-gm-seeds-retreat-in-eu.htm>

² Squire GR, Brooks DR, Bohan DA, et al. (2003) On the rationale and interpretation of the Farm Scale Evaluations of genetically modified herbicide-tolerant crops. *Philos Trans R Soc Lond B Biol Sci.* **358**(1439):1779–1799.

<http://www.scri.ac.uk/research/epi/agroecology/fieldandlandscape/fseofgmhtcrops>

³ Pleasants JM, Oberhauser KS (2013) Milkweed loss in agricultural fields because of herbicide use: effect on the monarch butterfly population. *Insect Conservation and Diversity* **6**(2):135–144.

⁴ Fraser K (2013) Glyphosate Resistant Weeds – Intensifying. Stratus Research. 25th January 2013.

<http://www.stratusresearch.com/blog07.htm> ; Benbrook CM (2012) Impacts of genetically engineered crops on pesticide use in the U.S. -- the first sixteen years. *Environmental Sciences Europe* **24**(1):24. <http://www.enveurope.com/content/24/1/24> ; Reuters: U.S. GMO crops show mix of benefits, concerns

- USDA report. 24th February 2014. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/02/24/usda-gmo-report-idUSL1NOLT16M20140224> .

⁵ IPS: U.S. Farmers Report Widespread GM Crop Contamination. 3rd March 2014.

<http://www.ipsnews.net/2014/03/farmers-address-u-s-data-gap-gm-crop-contamination/>