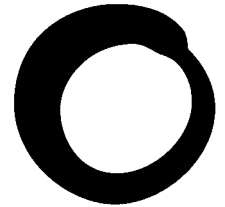


Briefing



**Friends of
the Earth
Cymru**

**Cyfeillion
y Ddaear
Cymru**

GM Free Welsh Environment

The campaign to keep GM crops out of Wales

Friends of the Earth Cymru inspires solutions to environmental problems, which make life better for people

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Registered office 26-28 Underwood Street London N1 7JQ

Printed on paper made from 100% post-consumer waste

September 2002

Introduction

Friends of the Earth has been campaigning against genetically modified (GM) crops (BOX 1 for introduction) being grown in the UK since 1997. The group has numerous concerns about the safety of the crops, and their potential impact on the environment and human health. It is not only environmentalists who hold these concerns, but also groups campaigning on international development and a growing body of scientists (BOXES 1a and 2). This briefing gives a largely historical account of Friends of the Earth Cymru's campaign for a GM Free Welsh Environment. More information on the current situation is available from Friends of the Earth Cymru.

GM science is new and incomplete and the scientific experiments carried out to test their safety have thus far largely been carried out by the biotechnology companies themselves. Many commentators claim these experiments require independent testing. Recently, some of the tests carried out by the biotechnology companies were scrutinised in a public hearing and were widely criticised (see Box 6, page 5).

When the National Assembly for Wales was established in 1999, Friends of the Earth Cymru began its campaign to persuade the Assembly to restrict the growth of GM crops in Wales. The group conducted research into the legal extent of the Assembly's powers and studied the growing scientific case against the release of GM crops into the environment. This showed that the Assembly could indeed take action to prevent some of these crops from being grown in Wales. Friends of the Earth Cymru then launched its campaign for a GM Free Welsh Environment, suggesting that organic and environmentally sensitive farming should take priority.

Within a year, the campaign had successfully argued a detailed legal and scientific case to the Assembly, and persuaded members of all political parties in the Assembly to support the demand for a restrictive policy on GM crops. The Assembly, in a democratic triumph for Friends of the Earth Cymru and the Welsh environment, adopted the policy unanimously. This marked the first significant step towards a GM Free Welsh Environment. This briefing sheet will lay out the background behind this landmark campaign to show how this major policy success was achieved. The consequences of this have been

BOX 1: What is Genetic Modification?

All living organisms contain a specific set of instructions on a long complex molecule called DNA that sets down how they live, grow and develop. DNA is made of small sections, controlling different aspects of the organism's growth and characteristics, called genes. Simple organisms like bacteria may have a few thousand genes; complicated organisms may have many more - for example, maize has around 50,000 genes. In genetic modification, DNA is cut up, and genes are moved from one organism to another.

GM organisms are plants and animals that have been altered in this way. This changes the way the organism develops, making new types of plants and animals. For example, some crop plants have been modified to be resistant to certain weed killers (herbicide-resistant GM crops) and pests (pest-resistant GM crops).

Genetic modification is not a precise operation as the technology is still relatively new. Scientists do not fully understand or know what happens when they fuse genes into the DNA of another organism. More than one copy of the gene may be inserted, other genes may be 'switched off' or the genes vary in how they work. Understanding of how DNA and genes work is still very poor for most plants and animals no one even knows what the vast majority of the genes do or how they interact. The fact is, current genetic modification techniques are still unproven and highly experimental, playing with biological systems of which we understand very little. Indeed the new Scientific Adviser to the Department of the Environment and Rural Affairs, Professor Howard Dalton spoke to the BBC in July 2002 of the need for more research on the safety of GM crops (BOX 1a)

far reaching and are still protecting the Welsh environment today.

This has been most evident in 2002, when *no* experimental trials of GM crops at all were announced for Wales. To maintain Wales' GM Free status will require more work and political courage in the Assembly. The establishment of this policy is not the only part of this campaign. Several GM trials have been attempted, some completed, in Wales, and Friends of the Earth Cymru has worked hard to raise awareness of the potential dangers to the Welsh environment. The campaign chronology at the back of this briefing sheet covers these issues briefly. More detailed briefings on the potential impact of GM crops and technology on human health and the environment are available from Friends of the Earth Cymru.

BOX 1a Prof. Howard Dalton, Chief Scientific Adviser to the Department of the Environment and Rural Affairs speaks of his "concern that we are moving specific genes, often just one at a time as opposed to the many thousands you do with normal plant breeding. What we don't know is the implications of what that one foreign gene might have on other proteins in the recipient plant material." to the BBC, July 2002

The Campaign

The GM-Free Welsh Environment campaign was launched in July 1999 at the Royal Welsh Show. The aims of the campaign were "to persuade the National Assembly for Wales to exercise its powers to ensure that it will not permit the release of GM crops into the Welsh Environment unless it is satisfied that to do so would be safe for human health and the environment; and to promote Welsh organic and environmentally sensitive farming practices and food produce." This was based on the legal analysis of the Assembly's powers.

BOX 2 "We cannot at present know whether there are any serious risks to the environment or to human health involved in producing GM crops or consuming GM food products... adverse effects are likely to be irreversible" British Medical Association, 1999.

A letter from Friends of the Earth Cymru in the *Western Mail* marked the launch, co-signed by 18 other organisations representing a broad coalition of interests from the business and voluntary sectors in Wales. The Leaders of the three then-opposition political parties in the Assembly (Mike German, Welsh Liberal Democrats, Dafydd Wigley, Plaid Cymru and Nick Bourne, Welsh Conservatives) signed the letter in support. A petition was also launched supporting the aims of the campaign. Friends of the Earth local groups throughout Wales publicised the petition widely and it was finally handed in to the Assembly with over 10,500 signatures. More petitions sent on later took this figure to over 11,000.

Legal debates

While it was clear that many Assembly Members (AMs) supported the principle of the campaign, there was some confusion as to the actual powers of the Assembly to restrict the planting of GM crops. This was because legal advice from Assembly officials stated that a ban on GM crops was not possible under European Law. Friends of the Earth Cymru disputes the quality of this legal advice to the Assembly; more importantly, the campaign has never called for a complete ban. European law grants two types of licences for GM crops to be released into the environment, an experimental (Part B) licence and a commercial (Part C) one (BOX 3). In Wales, the main difference between Part B and Part C is that the Assembly must grant approval for a Part B GM crop to be released into the environment. Part C crops, as they are supposed to have been through rigorous safety assessments and all the regulatory channels, do not need the Assembly's approval and can be planted anywhere in the UK without consultation. To restrict these, the Assembly must have detailed grounds for considering

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that a 'GMO [genetically modified organism] constitutes a risk to human health or the environment' (Article 23, European Directive 2001/18/EC).

BOX 3 How can GM crops be grown in the UK?

Releases of GM crops into the environment require a licence under European Directive 2001/18/EC, which grants licences for two types of release: *Experimental releases* get a Part B licence, and *Commercial releases* (which permit marketing) receive a Part C licence. The Directive also lays out the risk assessment process that the crop must undergo before being considered for a licence.

In 1998, the risk assessment procedure defined by the Directive was deemed inadequate by the EU's Environment Ministers. They decided to extend the range of scientific tests that GM crops would have to pass. As previous risk assessments did NOT cover these wider ranging issues, one of the UK Government's scientific advisory panels, the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment (ACRE), recommended further experiments to gain this information.

The UK Government then launched its programme of Farm Scale Evaluations (FSEs), essentially a gigantic outdoor experiment with our countryside. The companies behind the crops had not tested them to the higher standards now required, so the Government paid for safety testing with taxpayer's money, while ignoring public opinion which was largely against the crops. Yet the safety of the crops and their effects on the environment has not been established.

For example, the biotechnology company, Aventis, has developed a herbicide (weed killer)-resistant maize, called ChardonLL. This had already received a Commercial licence (Part C) under the Directive earlier in 1998. Yet its effects on the environment, or indeed on animals intended to be fed with it (i.e. cattle, as the crop is intended for animal feed) had not even been studied, as this was not legally required before 1998. The crop has only been tested on chickens and rats. Independent assessments of these tests showed that the chickens fed the GM maize in the tests showed a 'suspicious trend of dying', yet ACRE did not examine this further. ACRE admitted that 'the experiment should be reanalysed again' on Radio 4, Farming Today on 27th April 2002.

Despite having a commercial licence, Aventis agreed to its crop being used in the FSEs, some of which were planted in Wales. The fact that this crop is only now being evaluated to assess in detail its impact on the environment only serves to highlight the deficiencies of the approvals process and that of the quality and reliability of the scientific advice available to the UK and Assembly

Therefore, experimental releases in Wales required the approval of the Assembly and Friends of the Earth Cymru had found that the Assembly could legitimately control the release of these particular types of GM crops by not granting approval. The crux of the campaign was it did not call for a ban on the experimental GM crops, but a much more thorough assessment of them. The UK Government's scientific advisers claim that GM crops are 'safe', yet they do this on the basis that there has not yet been any evidence of harm. The campaign hung on the fact that the Assembly could require assurances that the crop was not 'capable of causing damage'. This assurance is not only more stringent, but also one that is unlikely to be given in the near future, due to the lack of independent scientific assessment of these crops.

Yet the Assembly's legal advisers were stuck on the idea that the campaign called for a ban, and numerous letters came from the Assembly denying Friends of the Earth Cymru's assertions. To convince the Assembly Government that it could indeed restrict the growing of some GM crops without banning them, independent lawyers were commissioned to check the legal situation. These lawyers were Fordham and Gallafent; from Blackstone Chambers (Mike Fordham is one of the UK's leading experts on judicial review, whereby a judge rules whether a Government decision was taken

lawfully). Their advice confirmed Friends of the Earth Cymru's view that the Assembly did have powers to restrict the planting of experimental GM crops. This legal opinion was presented to the Chair of the Agriculture Committee on 9th March 2000, and confirmed that the Assembly could:

'refuse to grant such consents [for releasing experimental GM crops into the Welsh environment] unless the position is that sufficient information is available to the Assembly to enable it to conclude with confidence that the release is *not capable* of causing damage to the Welsh environment...' [emphasis added].

This established the credibility of Friends of the Earth Cymru's legal advice over that which AMs received from their officials. The next stage was to turn this legal opinion into a motion for the Assembly to debate, vote in favour of and adopt as a policy that would be implemented and adhered to. Although the policy did not refer to the release of GM crops with a commercial (i.e. Part C) licence, it would nonetheless be a significant step towards a GM Free Welsh Environment.

Friends of the Earth Cymru drafted a motion (the GM motion) to put to the Assembly for it to vote on. This used the wording of the independent legal opinion to ensure that no further arguments on the legality of the policy would ensue. AMs from all four parties tabled this on 12 May 2000 and it was due for discussion on 24 May 2000. Friends of the Earth Cymru was confident of the support of the three opposition parties but was concerned that the Labour leadership would impose the whip (BOX 4) on its members to oppose the motion.

On the morning of 24 May it emerged that the Assembly Government had tabled amendments to the motion that would destroy its intended purpose and meaning completely. This, if passed unnoticed, could have opened the Assembly to a successful legal challenge. Friends of the Earth Cymru responded quickly and urgently, urging AMs to vote against the amendments, but in favour of the motion. Just as the debating chamber doors opened, an opposition party official said that the Assembly Government was going to vote in favour of the motion, and the backbenchers would have a Free Vote. As AMs from all four parties had tabled the motion, we felt confident the motion would be passed, yet were wary of the amendments.

The lengthy debate on the motion was accompanied by strong protests against the amendments, during which they were withdrawn. When the vote came, it was unanimously in favour of the motion, at 56-0, a landslide vote with no abstentions or votes against.

Friends of the Earth Cymru was delighted. This represented a significant step for the Assembly in defining a distinctly Welsh voice in UK policy making. It was also the first step towards a truly GM Free Welsh Environment. No experimental GM crops have come to the Assembly for approval for release in Wales since the adoption of this restrictive motion. We are convinced that this is because there is not enough scientific evidence available to convince the Assembly the crops would not be

BOX 4 Political party members at all levels (within local Government, and Country and National Government) are under the 'Whip'. This is party policy determined by their Leaders, and tells them, in effect, which way to vote for motions. The whip is imposed in the majority of cases. A 'Free Vote' is where the whip is withdrawn. This means that the politician can vote whichever way they choose to do so.

At the time of this campaign, the Labour administration was in a minority, and the three opposition parties outnumbered them. However, Friends of the Earth Cymru was concerned that, should Labour members be under the whip, and some key opposition AMs be absent, then the motion could fall purely through lack of numbers.

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capable of causing damage.

Campaign success! Mark 2.

The market advantages of having no GM crops in Wales have been consistently promoted by Friends of the Earth Cymru. Supermarkets were responding to consumer pressure and were removing GM products from their shelves and the demand for organic produce was increasing by an estimated forty per cent. The campaign also emphasised the positive advantages for Wales of promoting locally produced environmentally friendly food, including the economic, environmental and social benefits. Some of this influence went towards the Agriculture Committee adopting a vision for agriculture in Wales that was 'clean and green' thus fulfilling the second part of the campaign aim.

What next?

The Assembly now has a policy to refuse to approve releases of experimental GM crops into the Welsh environment, unless it can be confident that they are not capable of causing damage. But what of those crops with a commercial (i.e. Part C) licence (BOX 3)?

Such a crop is ChardonLL, a herbicide-resistant GM maize made by the biotechnology company Aventis. Independent scrutiny of the safety tests on this crop showed the tests were severely lacking in quality (BOX 5). The UK

Government continues to uphold the supposed benefits of these crops, and to say they are 'safe'. This is despite the fact that there is no evidence of safety, only the absence of evidence of harm. Yet, there is an increasing body of evidence building up, indicating that these crops certainly have the potential to cause harm. Friends of the Earth has mounted four successful legal challenges over attempts by the UK Government to break the law in favour of GM crops.

The UK Government has tried to add ChardonLL to the UK National Seed List, whereby it could be marketed in the UK, but has failed to date, thanks to Friends of the Earth calling on the public to protest, leading to a Seeds Hearing.

This Hearing brought ChardonLL's questionable scientific safety tests into the public domain.

The Farmers Union of Wales agrees with Friends of the Earth Cymru that Wales could benefit economically from having a GM Free Welsh Environment. So do AMs, especially the current

BOX 5 "It wasn't really a good enough experiment to base a student project on, let alone a marketing consent for a GM product." Dr Steven Kestin, Department of Clinical Veterinary Science, University of Bristol, commenting on a scientific experiment to test the safety of a GM crop called ChardonLL, a GM maize made by Aventis, 27th April 2002, Farming Today This Week, Radio 4.

Criticisms by Dr Toby Knowles (from University of Bristol, and a Fellow of the Royal Statistical Society) on one of the safety tests:

"We are very concerned that science of this standard should actually still be discussed at this level. I mean it should have been picked up a long time beforehand that [the chicken study] was substandard"

"A further major flaw in the design of the study is that... a third treatment should have been included that... would allow you to identify that the study was actually working"

"The report on the statistical analysis is inadequate. It is not clear how the data were dealt with." Taken from the Verbatim Transcript of the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment (ACRE) T25 Maize Hearing, February 20th, 2002.

Agriculture Minister, Mike German, a Liberal Democrat and, when in opposition, a key supporter of the campaign. Mike German is also the Minister for Wales Abroad, and is in an excellent position to raise global awareness of the Assembly's precautionary stance on GM crops (BOX 6).

Conclusion

Campaigning by Friends of the Earth Cymru and other groups in Wales has succeeded in influencing the policy of the National Assembly for Wales. It has also secured a GM Free Welsh Environment, at least for now.

BOX 6 "We will... seek to exploit the marketing opportunities of identifying Welsh produce as GM-free" Letter from Mike German, Minister for Rural Development and Wales Abroad, to Owen John Thomas AM, dated 20th June 2002.

The National Assembly does have the power to prevent the further growth of GM crops in Wales until it can be confident that those crops are not capable of causing harm to human health or the environment. Friends of the Earth Cymru will continue campaigning until the Assembly uses all the powers at its disposal to protect the people, environment and rural economy of Wales.

What can I do?

Contact Friends of the Earth Cymru to join a Campaign Network of people willing to take rapid political action to keep GM crops out of Wales. Pressure from constituents has been vital to keep Assembly Members on their toes throughout the campaign. The more people who sign up, the more likely we are to win the next stages of the campaign.

The chronology of the GM Free Welsh Environment Campaign

Alongside the call for a restrictive policy, the campaign also covered wider events and issues, such as

Press for change

The Assembly needs to know that the Welsh public supports its position on GM crops. It has the power to strengthen its restrictive stance even more. Please write to your Assembly Member, asking them:

- **To reject any applications to market GM crops in the UK.**

ChardonLL came close to being included on the National Seed List, whereupon it could have been marketed in the UK. However, Friends of the Earth persuaded the public to object and to call for a Hearing (Seeds Listing Hearing). This public hearing examined a great deal of the scientific tests done on ChardonLL, exposing significant flaws in the safety testing.

- **To reject any attempts by the UK Government to restrict the public's rights to object to GM crops going on the market.**

A leaked document indicates that UK Government officials are trying just that, but to pass the necessary changes in the regulations requires the Assembly's consent. Friends of the Earth Cymru thinks that this move is being attempted to prevent events like the Seeds Hearings happening in the way they recently did.

- **To ensure the Assembly uses its powers to prohibit planting of GM crops in Wales.**

The Assembly has the powers to do this if it believes that there is a 'risk to human health or the environment' using Article 23 of the new GMO Directive 2001/18/EC. This new Directive is the recently amended European Directive 90/220/EC.

- **to ask the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment (ACRE) for an opinion on all GM crops currently licensed, under the conditions of the Assembly's restrictive policy.**

- **To investigate establishing a Welsh ACRE to give advice to the Assembly.**

Friends of the Earth Cymru believes that the National Assembly should not be bound to receive its advice on these matters from a body which is shared between Governments across the UK. A

objecting to Farm Scale Evaluations in Wales and to the commercialization of a GM seed variety (ChardonLL). These are described in brief below.

11th March 1999 GM trial in Monmouth – Two GM trial sites near Llanishen announced in the Monmouthshire Beacon. Friends of the Earth Cymru instantly objects on the grounds that the two oilseed rape crops (with different genetic modifications) could cross-pollinate with wild relatives. The local MP takes up the concerns, including those of his local constituents, with the farmer who later pulls out of the trial.

22nd July 1999 Campaign launched - at Royal Welsh Show. Petition publicised. Letter in Western Mail signed by numerous organisations and prominent figures including: Nick Bourne AM, leader

Welsh Conservatives, National Assembly; Dr Neil Caldwell, Lindsay Collin, Rachel's Organic Dairy; Gilli Davies, Welsh food expert; Ron Davies AM MP; John Davis, Wales Green Party; Huw Edwards, MP; Sue Essex AM; Michael German, leader of the Liberal Democrats, National Assembly; Dr Madeleine Havard, Chair, Wales Wildlife and Countryside Link; Elenid Jones, Christian Aid; Simon Newcombe, National Chef of Wales 1998; Bob Parry, President, Farmers Union of Wales; Morgan Parry, Wildlife Trusts Wales; Peter Segger, Organic Farm Foods (Wales Ltd) Lampeter; Dr Tim Stowe, Director, RSPB Cymru; Malcolm Walker, Iceland Frozen Foods, Deeside; Dafydd Wigley AM MP, President of Plaid Cymru.

2nd August 1999 GM-Free Assembly - Friends of the Earth Cymru reveals that Assembly Members eat GM-Free food, thanks to their caterer's policy.

6th September 1999 GM-Free Welsh Environment - legal opinion presented to the Assembly. This states that the Assembly has powers under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to prevent the release of GM crops into the Welsh environment unless confident that the release is 'not capable of causing damage'. Much stronger than merely 'safe'.

17th February 2000 First GM seed to approach UK market - Friends of the Earth Cymru learns that the Assembly needs to decide whether or not to grant provisional approval for a GM maize, ChardonLL, to be added to the National Seed List. Once a seed variety is on the List, it may then be marketed anywhere in the UK. Agriculture Secretary's office is contacted, which is unaware of this proposed decision, as well as all the members of the Agriculture Committee.

24th February 2000 Statement of Opinion tabled - by Welsh Liberal Democrat Leader, Mike German, stating "This Assembly opposes the addition of T25 genetically modified maize to the National Seed List in Wales, and believes that the European Commission should be consulted to see how the sale and use of these seeds could be banned in Wales without breaching European Union rules." Other AMs are encouraged to sign up in support.

1st March 2000 First GM seed to approach market; decision delayed - Provisional Listing decision for ChardonLL (GM forage maize) delayed for a month whilst Friends of the Earth Cymru bombards the Assembly with scientific and legal grounds for refusing to List the seed (including that the maize had not been tested for its effects on humans, animal health or the soil). This results in the majority of the Agriculture Committee recommending that the then-Agriculture Secretary, Christine Gwyther, not List the seed. Ms Gwyther grants provisional approval on 29th March, on the basis of misleading advice from top Government scientists (this analysis has since been confirmed up by the RSPB at the Seeds Listing Hearing about ChardonLL. BOX 7)

9th March 2000 Assembly's powers confirmed - Independent legal opinion commissioned by Friends of the Earth confirms Assembly's powers to prevent the release of GM crops. Presented to the Chair of the Agriculture Committee, Rhodri Glyn Thomas AM.

28th April 2000 Flintshire GM trial - Friends of the Earth Cymru reveals that a GM maize trial (coincidentally ChardonLL) is planned for Sealand in Flintshire, Wales. UK Government officials had authorised the trial thinking it was in Cheshire, England. When the error was exposed, officials said

BOX 7 "We believe it is misleading [for ACRE to] refer to the changes in relation to risk management procedures... as mere clarification... the scope of the new requirements is significantly broadened and expanded as compared with original requirements." Dr Mark Avery, Director of Conservation, RSPB, referring to the broadening of the safety assessments required by the GMO Directive in 1998, at the Seeds Listing Hearings on ChardonLL, one of several criticisms.

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they would withdraw the trial, then didn't. The Assembly and local people were not consulted, moreover the Assembly was in recess at the time and members were unlikely to be aware of what was happening. Aventis said it would withdraw the trial if told to do so by UK Government officials. This fails to occur.

10th May 2000 Flintshire GM trial - Ms Gwyther makes a statement in the Assembly that the trial should not go ahead until consultation with the local people had taken place. ChardonLL goes into the ground that very day.

23rd May 2000 Petition – A 10,700-signature petition handed in to Assembly Members, calling for a GM Free Welsh Environment. More petitions sent on later took this figure to over 11,000.

24th May 2000 GM policy – The whole Assembly unanimously backs a cross-party motion for a GM-Free Welsh Environment, based on the independent legal opinion commissioned by Friends of the Earth. This means that all experimental releases of GM crops in Wales are unlikely to receive approval.

22nd June 2000 GM trial legal? - The legality of the Flintshire trial is still in question. Ms Gwyther's advice was that the trial was legal, yet when the advice is examined problems are identified. Independent lawyers commissioned by Friends of the Earth raise four legal question marks over the advice given to Ms Gwyther - saying that there was insufficient information in that advice to say conclusively whether or not the trial was legal. The then-new Agriculture Minister, Carwyn Jones refuses to assure that the law has been adhered to by saying the information is 'commercially confidential'. Therefore, the Assembly still does not know for sure.

28th June 2000 GM meeting - Friends of the Earth Cymru and opposition Assembly Members meet with Ms Gwyther and her officials in order to work out how to implement the Assembly's GM Policy most effectively. Ms Gwyther confirms that she wishes to operate the most restrictive policy possible. The meeting ends in a joint statement, with several jointly agreed conclusions, including a) a public meeting would be held in Sealand, Flintshire by end of July, b) ACRE is to present its advice on GM crops to the Assembly in much greater detail.

19th July 2000 Joint statement opposing Flintshire trial - with 41 organisations and prominent individuals, coordinated by Friends of the Earth Cymru.

14th September 2000 Flintshire GM trial - Assembly holds public meeting in Connahs Quay, Flintshire, seven weeks after promised. Ms Gwyther had made a firm commitment to hold one before the end of July. Although Friends of the Earth Cymru had arranged a date and venue for its own meeting, it had to cancel on the 19th July due to all the politicians who were invited to speak declining, on the basis that they would speak at the Assembly's public meeting. This meeting was very poorly advertised, very few were aware it was going ahead. Friends of the Earth Cymru's meeting would have given people the chance to confront their representatives. No politicians were at the Assembly's public meeting despite having said they would be, only officials.

16th October 2000 Partnership Government announced – Two Liberal Democrat AMs join the Cabinet in a coalition government, including the Leader, Mike German AM. This now gives the coalition government a majority in the Assembly.

19th October 2000 draft Seeds (National List of Varieties) Regulations 2000 - Majority of AMs reject defective Seeds Listing Regulations, which in Friends of the Earth Cymru's view would restrict the Assembly's powers to reject seed varieties from the National Seed List on grounds relating to

adverse effects on the health of persons, animals or plants. This decision was delayed by several weeks. Friends of the Earth Cymru believes the Government in Wales delayed the decision until the coalition was formed so that the new majority coalition Government could push the regulations through, as it was under pressure from the Ministry for Agriculture Fisheries and Food. Information from a well placed source states that the Liberal Democrats will vote in favour of the regulations, however, after a concentrated lobbying effort by Friends of the Earth staff, supporters and local group members, we persuaded them to change their minds. The regulations were defeated mainly as the Labour backbench demanded a free vote, and the non-cabinet Liberal Democrats were then able to vote as they would have, ie against. The two Cabinet Lib-Dem AMs voted in favour of the defective regulations, as feared.

3rd April 2001 Pembrokeshire and Flintshire GM trials – Three ChardonLL GM maize trials announced for Wales. The Flintshire trial was again in Sealand, the other two planned for Mathry in Pembrokeshire.

16th April 2001 Public Meeting in Mathry – Local communities in Pembrokeshire call a public meeting to discuss the 2 GM trials. Friends of the Earth Cymru, as one of the speakers, highlights previous successful community campaigns against GM trials. These campaigns succeeded, it said, because they worked closely with the farmers involved and persuaded them to pull out of the trials themselves.

8th May 2001 Mathry trials withdrawn – The farmer intending to grow the GM maize on his land pulls out due to intense local opposition, coordinated by a local coalition of farmers, environmentalists and other concerned individuals, called GM Free Cymru. This was such that the farmer could not even find anyone locally to plant the seed into the ground.

14th July 2001 Demonstration against Flintshire trial – several hundred people gather to show their opposition to the GM maize in Sealand, coordinated by a local group called Custodians of the Land. Despite having tried to persuade the farmer not to plant, he had gone ahead. Local people are furious, enter the field, and trash part of the crop.

15th May 2001 Environmental Prohibition Order – Agriculture Minister Carwyn Jones imposes an Environmental Prohibition Order on Aventis, setting an ‘isolation distance’ of 200m between GM maize and other maize crops. This is to protect non-GM maize getting contaminated by GM pollen. Friends of the Earth Cymru points out that cross-pollination at levels greater than 0.1% contamination would be a ‘typical rather than exceptional occurrence’ at 200m, as maize pollen can travel up to 800m. The Assembly’s move opens up a debate in Europe about whether conventional and organic crops can be grown in the same area as GM crops and still maintain their GM free status, i.e. by being conventional or organic.

14 March 2002 No GM trials in Wales! – The UK Government announces the plantings of this years GM trials, and none are in Wales. Friends of the Earth Cymru and its local groups, other campaigners and local communities throughout Wales rejoice at the news.

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This briefing was written by Raoul Bhambral, for Friends of the Earth Cymru

For more information:

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