

GM co-existence – A test for Mr Miliband

Secretary of State David Miliband's new regime of openness and transparency seems not to have survived the old MAFF miasma of cynicism and disingenuity that still hangs around Defra. Slipping out the details of the proposed GM co-existence regime on a hot afternoon at the fag end of the Parliamentary session (with a consultation period that largely takes place during the holiday season) is more in keeping with the old guard - who thought stakeholders were something to do with cattle - rather than the new style bloggers.

On top of which it is proposed that the measures will be implemented administratively by Statutory Instrument, thereby avoiding discussion in Parliament. This is a technique beloved by elitist bureaucrats, oligarchs and particular types of dictators (those who claim a populist mandate) when they can't be bothered with due process, when their incompetence has led to time pressure, or when they don't think they will win a democratic argument.

Certainly nothing has happened to change the view expressed overwhelmingly in the national debate "*GM Nation?*" that UK citizens do not want GM crops grown in this country. Nothing has changed to alter the conclusion of the various Cabinet Office studies that there is no commercial case for growing GM crops in the UK. But neither, obviously, has anything changed the determination of the GM industry and some in this government to press this unpopular, redundant and potentially damaging technology upon the citizens and environment of the UK.

David Miliband has made an interesting start at Defra. The promise he displays has stopped us throwing this consultation document in the bin – for now. It must not be allowed to be a cosmetic exercise. It would be an undemocratic folly to foist GM crops on to the UK – at least without a comprehensive co-existence regime that will properly protect organic and all non-GM production. In that hope, we will be taking part in the consultation and urge all readers to do the same.

Lawrence Woodward O.B.E