

## **France jumps the gun on GM Pharming test sites**

The UK campaign alliance - GM Freeze - (EFRC is a member) has condemned the French Government for licensing two sites for crops genetically engineered to produce pharmaceuticals ahead of any agreed EU legislation to deal with any crop contamination and liability which may arise.

Two out of 17 new GM crop test sites announced by the French Minister of agriculture, Mr Dominique Bussereau, include maize and tobacco genetically engineered to produce pharmaceuticals.

Pharmaceutical crops or “pharming” are second generation GM crops designed to produce drugs, vaccines and other medical products. They have already been grown experimentally in the USA where problems of contamination have already occurred.

In 2003, GM maize containing genes to produce a vaccine for transmissible gastroenteritis vaccine in pigs contaminated a following soya crop destined for human food and animal feed. The incident highlighted the risks of contamination of a food crop with potentially harmful and untested products intended for medical application.

The locations of GM test sites in France are kept secret, so neighbouring farmers are unable to take action to prevent the risk of contamination by GM pollen fertilizing their plants. France exports a variety of maize products to the UK including seed for planting and grain for animal feed.

Says Pete Riley of GM Freeze -

“The decision of the French government to license pharm crops for field testing is madness. A serious debate is needed about whether such crops should be grown in open fields at all. The use of maize, a food crop, increases the risk of accidental exposure of people and animals to biologically active chemicals produced by these plants. France has not resolved how GM contamination of other crops will be prevented or who will be liable if things go wrong. The gung-ho attitude of the French Minister needs to be controlled as well as the GM crops themselves”.