

## **Honesty call for info on GM potato trials**

The campaign group GM Freeze (The Organic Research Centre is a member) has called for Defra and the life science company BASF to be open with local people in East Yorkshire and Cambridgeshire about both the details and purpose of the GM potato trials planned in each county. Defra must delay any decision on trials until the safety of the potatoes has been established, it says.

At a recent meeting BASF officials confirmed to GM Freeze that the genes used in the GM potatoes came from a Mexican wild relative of the potato and not, as previously stated by BASF, a "wild potato".

While the wild relative, *Solanum bulbocastanum*, is found in Mexico and cannot naturally cross breed with potatoes, potatoes are members of the nightshade family - a group of plants known to naturally produce toxins. There are concerns that such toxins from the wild relative may be carried into the GM potatoes inadvertently and thus enter the food chain.

Pete Riley of GM Freeze says -

'BASF has confirmed to me that their previous greenhouse and outdoor trials in Europe have already convinced them that GM blight resistance is effective. It is now clear that the Cambridgeshire and East Yorkshire trials are about the commercial development of GM potatoes and not merely to test if the resistance is effective.

The use of genes from a wild relative of potatoes, and not wild potatoes, raise additional safety concerns that need to be cleared up before outdoor trials commence. We need to be sure that none of the 80 GM lines are producing unexpected toxins.

The company and Defra are guilty of putting out misleading information. It's time BASF came clean and made a clear, honest statement about the true purpose behind these risky trials and present clear evidence that the GM spuds are safe. Defra should not approve the trial until the safety has been established."

**ends**