



Memorandum submitted by Munloch GM Vigil (A16)

1. We have long campaigned for a public debate on the issue of GM crops and food. We believe it is essential that the public has as much say as possible in the future of the food it eats, and quite obviously the issues surrounding GM are fundamental to this. We therefore supported the exercise entitled '*GM Nation?*' and the work preceding it undertaken by the AEBC and the independent Public Debate Steering Board. We would also like to pay our compliments to the way in which the results were processed and presented.
2. We ourselves took part in the debate and organised numerous events across Scotland focussing mainly on the Highlands. We found a good level of public interest and knowledge. People who involved themselves came from all age groups and all sectors of society. At this level '*GM Nation?*' has to be deemed a success, although there was constant scepticism about whether the government would listen.
3. The debate lasted six weeks and was not heavily publicised or in our eyes adequately funded, however forty thousand people took part making it the largest public exercise of its kind ever carried out. We therefore support the reasons behind the debate, the fact that the debate occurred, and in most ways the way it was carried out. However, we do feel that more funding should have been available, more time given over to the process and better publicity used. These would have all improved the debate.
4. Referring to the points made in the last paragraph (3), we feel that it is important that you are aware that the Foods Standards Agency decided early on in the process to run its own parallel public debate. This cost £110,000, reached very few people and served only to confuse the general public. The problems outlined above, could have been partly addressed if the FSA had simply backed the independent Public Debate Steering Board, provided £110,000 to the '*GM Nation?*' budget, and helped publicise the whole exercise. We feel it was a gross error of judgement on behalf of the FSA not to do this, and question the motives of its 'parallel debate'.
5. The materials used in the debate were on the whole acceptable, although there is always room for improvement. However, once again we feel that it is important to draw your attention to the fact that the Food Standards Agency published its own materials. This again confused the overall issue and unfortunately, as has been well documented, these materials were not acceptable. It is worth quoting at this stage directly from the FSA Consumer Committee Report to Board (6th May 2003) on the FSA's materials and debate:

Point 5: "It said that the information provided in the booklet and on the website was useful but incomplete and therefore biased as it ignored existing concerns about GM foods."

Point 6: "The Committee questioned the methods adopted and the use of resources. Whilst it agreed qualitative research was needed to explore consumer concerns in more depth, the Committee felt that the commissioned research had not achieved this very effectively." It went on to say that the programme lacked clear objectives.
6. As far as we are aware the FSA's information also contained inaccuracies. An example of this is shown on page 17 of their booklet ('GM Food—Opening Up The Debate'), where it is stated that Australia, China, India and Germany grow GM foods. This is not the case. GM flowers and cotton are grown in Australia, China and India, but they do not allow the growing of GM food crops. Germany does not allow the growing of commercial GM crops at all.
7. It is wholly unacceptable that a public body such as the FSA produces biased and inaccurate information, and we request that appropriate action is taken by the Committee on this point.
8. We also feel that it should be questioned why the FSA decided to carry out its 'parallel debate', when a more than adequate public debate was to be held. Moreover, why when this caused considerable concern, expressed by a wide range of well-respected organisations, did the FSA choose to continue instead of taking the far more effective decision of supporting '*GM Nation?*'

7 October 2003

[Previous](#)[Contents](#)[Next](#)[Commons](#)[Parliament](#)[Lords](#)[Search](#)[Enquiries](#)[Index](#)