

11 July 2003

Immediate release

Ref: Economics of GM Crops - Prime Minister's Strategy Unit report

Benefits of GM crops 'not proven'

The UK Food Group welcomes the acknowledgement in the new report from the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit that the claims made by the biotech industry and other proponents of GM crops are 'not proven' in practice.

In relation to developing countries, the UK Food Group supports the report's recognition that it is more important to "... focus on the objectives [of agriculture], and to consider GM crops as one possible solution - rather than to consider GM crops in isolation" [1] and on shaping development assistance more closely to agricultural practices and to developing country needs.

The report, importantly, also recognises that issues such as reform of agricultural subsidies will have a far greater economic impact on agriculture than GM crops. [2]

We are, however, disappointed that the study has not been more rigorous in considering the development issues raised by the possible introduction of GM crops in developing countries. It is the UK Food Group's view [3] that GM crops are irrelevant for the eradication of hunger: rather, our priority is on mainstreaming support for sustainable agriculture approaches that will meet the needs of the majority - poor smallholder farmers in developing countries.

The report does, however, acknowledge the need for more examination of this significant area [4], and we call on the Government to set up an independent review of these issues to fill in the gaps identified by this report.[5]

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Notes for editors:

[1] Strategy Unit's Report "Field Work: Weighing up the Costs and Benefits of GM crops" paragraph 5.1.8

[2] Strategy Unit's Report "Field Work: Weighing up the Costs and Benefits of GM crops" Executive Summary, paragraph 36 'Wider developments in agriculture ...'

[3] See UK Food Group's Briefing "GM Crops and Developing Countries" (attached)

[4] Strategy Unit's Report "Field Work: Weighing up the Costs and Benefits of GM crops" paragraphs 5.1.6 - 5.1.8

[5] The UK Food Group believes that such an independent review should include input and analysis by a panel comprising a wide range of expertise in social, economic, environmental and development issues, and should involve smallholder farmers and consumers from developing countries. (We note that the Strategy Unit failed to appoint an independent Expert Group to advise on this important area, despite appointing three Expert Groups to advise on other areas of the study.)

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