



### ISSUES & INFORMATION

15 June 2005

## Coexistence plans blown away by pollen drift

- Tim Lang, professor of food policy at Thames Valley University, said: "The early assurances from the industry and the government that a buffer zone would allow safety and choice for consumers are falling apart. It raises environmental health worries, and what we don't yet know is whether these warnings will translate into a risk to human health."

"OK, we know that cross-pollination will occur but we've got thirty years of experience to say we know how far pollen will travel. And therefore what we've done is we'll grow a GM crop at a distance away from a non-GM crop, so the people that want non-GM can buy non-GM, and the people that want GM can buy GM. The two will not get mixed up. Everybody will have the right to choose." - Dr Paul Rylott, Seed Manager for AVENTIS, speaking on 'Matter of Fact', BBC2, 12 October 2000 ---

### GM crop taints honey two miles away, test reveals

**The Sunday Times**, September 15, 2002  
<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,2087-416027,00.html> [you have to register for Times' sites]

EVIDENCE that genetically modified (GM) crops can contaminate food supplies for miles around has been revealed in independent tests commissioned by The Sunday Times.

The tests found alien GM material in honey from beehives two miles from a site where GM crops were being grown under government supervision. It is believed to have been carried there by bees gathering pollen in the GM test sites.

The disclosure, showing that GM organisms can enter the food chain without consumers — or even farmers — knowing they are present, will undermine assurances by Tony Blair and ministers that such crops can be tested in Britain without contaminating the food chain.

The test results come as ministers, under pressure from the American agrochemical lobby, mount a huge consultation exercise to persuade the public of the virtues of GM foods. They have previously given assurances that consumers "are not being used as guinea pigs".

The GM material was found in honey sold from farmer David Rolfe's hives at Newport-on-Tay in Fife, almost two miles from one of 18 sites holding trials of GM oil-seed rape.

A test carried out by GeneScan, a respected independent laboratory in Bremen, Germany, checked for traces of an NOS terminator, one of four modified genes which make the crop resistant to pesticides. This proved positive.

A second test confirmed that GM material in the honey could have come only from oil-seed rape grown at Wester Friarton, in Newport-on-Tay, by Aventis, one of the world's biggest biotechnology firms. The fact that the GM material travelled such a distance makes a mockery of the government's 50m-200m crop-free "buffer" zones that were created around GM sites to protect neighbouring farms. Critics have claimed that the GM crop trial sites are too close to other farms. America has buffer zones of up to 400m, Canada up to 800m, and the European Union recommends a 5km (three-mile) zone for GM oilseed rape.

When Rolfe first raised his concerns, government officials said

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that although it was not possible to rule out cross-pollination, they did not believe it should be "a source of concern".

"I'm very angry and disappointed," Rolfe said last week. "I feel I've been denied the right and freedom to eat my own GM-free produce. Now we can't eat the honey or sell it."

This weekend Defra, the ministry responsible for the crop trials, said: "We have not seen the results of the study but will treat any such findings extremely seriously."

In the case of GM rape, like most GM products, there is no evidence that contamination poses a health risk. Concern centres on maintaining the integrity of traditionally produced products.

Tim Lang, professor of food policy at Thames Valley University, said: "The early assurances from the industry and the government that a buffer zone would allow safety and choice for consumers are falling apart. It raises environmental health worries, and what we don't yet know is whether these warnings will translate into a risk to human health."

Britain has imposed a moratorium on the widespread planting of GM crops until it has analysed the impact of GM crop trials at 18 farm-scale sites around Britain.

However, The Sunday Times's tests confirm earlier work that was carried by Friends of the Earth, the environmental group, and will increase pressure on the government to scale down its support for the GM industry.

It will also come as a personal setback to Blair, who is determined that British companies will win a share of the potentially lucrative bioscience industry. In May the prime minister attacked GM protesters as part of an "anti-science fashion" in Britain.

The tests will bring pressure on Aventis, which was accused of a "serious breach" of regulations earlier this year after GM trials in 12 sites were contaminated with antibiotic genes. These are controversial because of the danger of gene transfer to bacteria in animals and humans, who could become immune to common life- saving antibiotics.

While the government tends to support the GM lobby, food retailers have been more cautious. The big supermarkets insist that such products are properly labelled and refuse to take honey from within six miles of UK test sites.

In Canada, a leading cultivator of GM crops, sales of honey have plummeted by 50% amid concern that the integrity of the product has been compromised.

A spokesmen for Aventis said: "We would be very interested in looking at both the origin of the honey sample and how the tests were carried out. We would like to look at this further

Source: Norfolk Genetic Information Network (ngin), <http://www.ngin.org.uk>

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