

24 June 2005

Rt Hon Tony Blair MP
The Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA

Dear Prime Minister,

We are delighted that you have chosen Africa as a focus of the G8 summit in Gleneagles, Scotland, in July. The summit provides an excellent opportunity for Great Britain to ensure that the serious issues facing this continent are addressed by the member countries of the G8.

Agriculture has a crucial role to play in developing countries, as a source of employment, income and food for the poorest people. The Nuffield Council on Bioethics published the Report, *The use of genetically modified crops in developing countries: a follow-up Discussion Paper*, in December 2003 (a copy is enclosed). The Discussion Paper concluded that genetically modified (GM) crops could make a useful contribution in tackling some specific agricultural problems in developing countries. Some examples of potential uses of GM crops in Africa are provided at **Annex A**.

However, the Discussion Paper also found that the freedom of choice of farmers in developing countries is being severely challenged by the agricultural policy of the European Union (EU). Developing countries might be reluctant to approve GM crop varieties because of fears that their current and future export markets in Europe might be jeopardised. The Discussion Paper includes the following recommendation:

We recommend that the European Commission (EC), the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and appropriate non-governmental organisations which monitor the agricultural policies of developing countries examine the consequences of EU regulatory policies for the use of GM crops in developing countries. We recommend that the European Commission establish a procedure to report on the impact of its regulations accordingly (paragraph 5.50).

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A summary of the rationale behind the recommendation is provided at **Annex B**.

As far as we are aware, this recommendation has not yet been implemented by the relevant organisations. We therefore urge you to highlight the effects of European regulations on the use of GM crops in developing countries, and the need to examine and report on any impacts, to the eight member countries of the G8 at the July summit.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bob Hepple". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line at the end.

Professor Sir Bob Hepple QC FBA
Chairman of the Council

Annex A

Examples of GM crops in Africa

GM bananas

Approximately half a billion people in Asia and Africa depend directly on farming of bananas. In Uganda, the crop is cultivated on one third of the arable land, and per capita consumption is 50 times higher than in the UK.¹ Research is currently being undertaken to genetically modify bananas to resist the Black Sigatoka fungus. Untreated, this fungus can reduce banana yields by as much as 70%. Currently, farmers spend one quarter of the production costs on fungicides, and farm workers may risk their health by applying the spray, up to 40 times per year. A GM banana, resistant to the fungus, could eliminate these problems, reducing the amount of fungicide required and, at the same time, increasing yields.

GM sweet potato

In Kenya, as in many other African developing countries, sweet potato is an important subsistence crop grown typically by small-scale farmers. About 40% of the harvest is usually kept for household consumption. Sweet potatoes can adapt to a wide range of environmental conditions and grow in both fertile and marginal areas. It is the second most important subsistence crop after maize. However, yields are low. The usual African yield of six tons per hectare is less than half of the global average.² Viruses and weevils frequently reduce yields by as much as 80%.³ Effective controls for these pathogens are not available. Since 1991 the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI), in cooperation with Monsanto and universities in the US, has developed GM sweet potato strains that are resistant to the feathery mottle virus. Royalty-free licensing agreements have been signed that allow KARI and research institutes in other African countries to use the technology in the future. The crops are currently being tested in field trials and it is expected that yields will increase by approximately 18-25%. Where farmers sell part of their harvest, it has been predicted that the increased income will be between 28-39%.⁴ However, some commentators caution against overly optimistic prognoses for the success of the GM sweet potato. They point out that there are three main viruses, and that resistance to the feathery mottle virus would not ensure protection against the other types.⁵

Other crops

More than 30 other genetically modified crops including maize, wheat, barley, millet, potatoes, and cowpea are under development in African countries such as Egypt, Kenya, Zimbabwe and South Africa.

¹ Pearce F (2003) Going bananas, *New Scientist* 177 (2378): 26–9.

² Qaim M (1999) The Economic Effects of Genetically Modified Orphan Commodities: Projections for Sweet Potato in Kenya ISAAA Brief No. 13 (Ithaca, NY: ISAAA).

³ Monsanto (2003) *Our commitments: Technology Cooperation*. Available:

http://www.monsanto.com/monsanto/layout/our_pledge/techcoop.asp. Accessed on: 20 Oct 2003.

⁴ Qaim M (1999) The Economic Effects of Genetically Modified Orphan Commodities: Projections for Sweet Potato in Kenya ISAAA Brief No. 13 (Ithaca, NY: ISAAA); Pew Initiative on Food and Biotechnology (2001) *Harvest on the Horizon: Future Uses of Biotechnology* (Washington, DC: Pew Initiative on Food and Biotechnology).

⁵ Odame H, Kameri-Mbote P and Wafula D (2002) Innovation and policy process: case of transgenic sweet potato in Kenya, in *Econ Polit Weekly*, XXXVII No 27.

Annex B

Extract from: Nuffield Council on Bioethics (2003) *The use of genetically modified crops in developing countries: a follow-up Discussion Paper*, available at: http://www.nuffieldbioethics.org/go/ourwork/gmcrops/page_218.html

Summary and recommendations

Pages xvii–xviii

The impact of European regulations on GM crops

The freedom of choice of farmers in developing countries is being severely challenged by the agricultural policy of the European Union (EU). Developing countries might well be reluctant to approve GM crop varieties because of fears of jeopardising their current and future export markets. They may also not be able to provide the necessary infrastructure to enable compliance with EU requirements for traceability and labelling (paragraphs 5.20-5.21).

One strategy which developing countries might choose could be to adopt GM crops for domestic use only. However, problems could arise if separation of GM crops and non-GM crops for export cannot be readily achieved. For example, small amounts of GM produce might become mixed with non-GM produce during storage. If current attitudes among EU policy makers and consumers prevail, countries which depend on exports to the European market might then be at considerable disadvantage (paragraphs 5.43-5.48).

A number of recent authoritative reviews have concluded that, based on current evidence, neither GM crops, nor food produced from GM crops, pose a significant risk to humans who consume them. However, complications could arise where risks for human health or the environment are exaggerated by the scepticism of some commentators from developed countries. Policy makers in developing countries would then be faced with very difficult choices. If a national policy that allowed the responsible domestic use of GM crops were adopted, it might well be perceived as promoting unsafe foods, and could lead to the loss of EU export markets. It is therefore important that policy makers in developing countries seek a range of advice about these issues.

There is a considerable imbalance between the hypothetical benefits afforded by the EU policy for its own citizens, and the probable and substantial benefits that could be afforded to developing countries. Current provisions of the revised Directive 2001/18/EC, Regulation 1830/2003/EC on Traceability and Labelling and of Regulation 1829/2003/EC on Food and Feed have not given sufficient consideration to the effects that these policies are likely to have on developing countries. We recommend that the European Commission (EC), the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and appropriate non-governmental organisations which monitor the agricultural policies of developing countries examine the consequences of EU regulatory policies for the use of GM crops in developing countries. We recommend that the European Commission establish a procedure to report on the impact of its regulations accordingly (paragraph 5.50).