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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **Campaigners tell supermarkets it's time to "show leadership" on GMOs**

*Joint letter asks retailers to refuse to stock products made from untested and unregulated genetically engineered plants and animals produced using a new technique called 'gene editing'.*

UNITED KINGDOM—Leaders from food, farming, student activism, religion, business, democratic reform and academia have written to British supermarkets asking them to refuse to stock foods produced from unregulated and unlabelled gene-edited crops and animals.

The more than 50 signatories to the joint letter<sup>1</sup>, among them the Soil Association, Landworkers' Alliance, Students for Sustainability, Green Christian and Professor Emeritus of Food Policy at City University, Tim Lang, represent a broad range of interests and specialities. They also represent the concerns of millions of supporters and members throughout the UK.

Recent surveys show that the majority of UK citizens remain unconvinced about the benefits of genetically engineered foods and are opposed to their introduction. (see notes)

Since unlabelled GMOs are unlawful in the EU, deregulation also compounds the post-Brexit headaches retailers are experiencing with dual regulations in their Northern Ireland stores. UK supermarkets, therefore, have further good reasons to take a stand.

The letter, organised by Beyond GM and Slow Food in the UK, comes in the midst of a 10-week public consultation<sup>2</sup> on government plans to remove regulatory controls, including consumer labelling, from plants and animals created using a new and experimental genetic engineering technology called 'gene editing'.

The government claims that gene-edited plants and animals will increase yields, reduce pesticide use and help fight climate change. Campaigners claim that more than 20 years' experience of genetically engineered crops has shown the technology has failed to address any of these issues and in some cases, such as pesticide use, it has made things worse.

Currently the UK is bound by the same robust regulations on genetically engineered crops and foods as the EU. This regulation was strengthened by the European Court of Justice in 2018. After a two-year-long review, the Court ruled that both scientifically and legally, gene editing is the same as genetic engineering and that gene-edited crops and animals are genetically modified organisms (GMOs)<sup>3</sup> and should be regulated as such. It notes also that the risks of gene-editing were likely to be the same as older style genetic engineering technologies.

The UK government is seeking to overturn this decision, to alter the definition of GMOs to exclude the plants and animals created using gene editing and to remove regulations that would require essential safety checks, monitoring and labelling.

<sup>1</sup> [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1DJ4qkWo15YuWEjeejZG1APNks\\_woxlu7/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1DJ4qkWo15YuWEjeejZG1APNks_woxlu7/view?usp=sharing)

<sup>2</sup> <https://consult.defra.gov.uk/agri-food-chain-directorate/the-regulation-of-genetic-technologies>

<sup>3</sup> <http://curia.europa.eu/juris/documents.jsf?num=C-528/16>

The letter asks supermarkets to “to listen to your customers, to be respectful of nature and science, to be mindful of the future and to demonstrate leadership by joining us in opposing the deregulation of genome edited crops and livestock in England and the rest of the UK.”

Pat Thomas, Director of Beyond GM, an organisation dedicated to raising the level of the debate on agricultural GMOs comments: *“The spectre of genetically engineered crops and animals raises inevitable concerns. Not just for human health and the environment but around ethics, societal values, consumer choice, the practicalities of business in post-Brexit Britain and transparency throughout the food chain. In its haste to deregulate, government is ignoring these complexities. Now more than ever it’s important that influential businesses such as supermarkets demonstrate foresight, leadership and loyalty to their customers by supporting robust regulation.”*

Shane Holland, Executive Chairman of Slow Food in the UK, an organisation dedicated to promoting more sustainable and community-orientated approaches to the food supply chain states: *“The majority of consumers are clear that they don’t want genetically engineered plants and animals on the supermarket shelves. We are asking stores to respect those wishes and instead concentrate on high quality, high welfare food for which our nation can be proud.”*

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#### Notes

- a) The *Consultation on the Regulation of Genetic Technologies* was launched by Defra on 7 January 2021 and will run until 17 March 2021.
- b) A 2020 [survey by Food Standards Scotland](#) found that, next to chlorinated chicken, genetically engineered foods are a top issue of concern for 57% of consumers. Another 2020 [study conducted by the National Centre for Social Research](#), which focused on Brexit-related issues, found that 59% wish to maintain a ban on genetically engineered crops. Yet another survey, in 2021, by the UK’s [Economic and Social Research Council](#) found that 64% of those who took part were opposed to the cultivation of genetically engineered food. Although not specifically focused on GMOs a recent [Unchecked UK survey](#) of so-called “Red Wall” swing voters, most of whom voted to leave the European Union, showed strong opposition to the weakening of food laws, a move that would be seen as a betrayal of their Brexit vote.

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#### About Slow Food in the UK

Slow Food in the UK is the umbrella body formed by Slow Food England, Slow Food Scotland, Slow Food Cymru and Slow Food Northern Ireland. Slow Food is a global, grassroots movement with thousands of members around the world that links the pleasure of food with a commitment to community and the environment.

#### About Beyond GM

Beyond GM raises awareness of issues around the use of genetically engineered food and farming. Its aim is to raise the level of the debate around this complex subject and to ensure that a greater variety of stakeholders’ voices are heard and the full range of issues and concerns are addressed.

#### For more information

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