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Y Dirprwy Weinidog Ffermio a Bwyd  
Deputy Minister for Farming and Food



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-04-583  
Ein cyf/Our ref RE/05122/14

William Powell AM  
Chair Petitions Committee  
Ty Hywel  
Cardiff Bay  
Cardiff  
CF99 1NA

 October 2014

*Dear William,*

Thank you for your letter of 30 September about the Welsh Government's approach to GM policy in Wales. The Welsh Government has a long-standing policy that is to maintain a restrictive and precautionary approach to GM crop cultivation that is consistent with UK and EU law. This policy approach recognises that the Welsh Government cannot legally ban GM crops in Wales because we have to work within a European legal framework. GM crops are approved at the EU level following a full risk assessment and, therefore, any variety of GM seed on the EC Common Seed Catalogue is available for marketing throughout the EU.

However, the Welsh Government recognises that within the scientific literature and reports available about GM there remains no consensus on a range of issues such as animal and human health, environmental safety or socio-economic issues arising from the introduction of GM crops and the associated herbicide regime. Our policy approach is, therefore, one of caution and recognises the need to protect our investment in clean, sustainable agriculture and our unique environment and landscape.

The Welsh Government fully supports the European Commission's proposal to allow Member States the option to choose whether or not to grow authorised GM crop varieties on all or part of their territory. This proposal achieved political agreement at Environment Council on 12 June and has been formally adopted by the Council of the European Union on 23 July. The file has since been passed to the European Parliament for their consideration. When adopted I believe that this will provide us with greater control over the growing of any future GM crops in Wales.

We believe that a broader and more holistic evaluation of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) should be undertaken before they are approved. The regulatory approval process should not only consider human health and the environment but also socio-economic issues. This is a view a number of Member States hold and has been recognised by the Commission. I therefore welcome the recent commitment made by the President-elect of the European Commission to review the current authorisation system for GMOs.

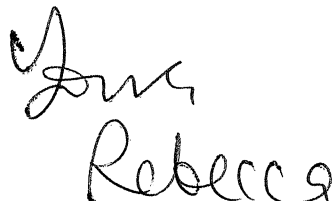
Turning to food and feed issues, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) has the UK policy lead for GM food and feed safety, and labelling matters. The FSA is neither for nor against GM: the FSA considers that GM products should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis and only be allowed on the market if they have been shown to be as safe as conventional (non-GM) food or feed. The FSA considers that consumers should be able to make an informed choice about whether or not to buy GM food through accurate labelling.

The current procedures for evaluation and authorisation of genetically modified (GM) food and feed are laid down in Regulation (EC) 1829/2003, which came into force in April 2004. The safety assessments are carried out by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), according to its published guidelines for the assessment of GMOs.

Each application is reviewed on a case-by-case basis, including a detailed consideration of the potential for toxic, nutritional and allergenic effects. GM foods may only be authorised for sale if they are judged not to present a risk to health, not to mislead consumers, and not to be of less nutritional value than the foods they are intended to replace. In carrying out its evaluation, EFSA may consult the authority responsible for food safety assessment in one of the European Union (EU) Member States. In the UK this is the Food Standards Agency, which seeks expert advice on GM foods from the independent Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes (ACNFP) as appropriate. The FSA is content that the EFSA safety assessments are robust and provide a good basis for decision making. Consistent with Government stated policies, decisions on authorisation should be science based and be proportionate.

On the basis of these assessments, it is the FSA's view that there is no reason to suppose that GM feed presents any more risk to farmed livestock than conventional feed. GM feed, which is very unlikely to contain viable GMOs, is digested by animals in the same way as conventional feed. Food from animals fed on authorised GM crops is considered to be as safe as food from animals fed on non-GM crops.

The FSA supports the principle of consumer choice through accurate labelling, in recognition that some people will want to choose not to buy GM food, however carefully it has been assessed for safety.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rebecca'.

**Rebecca Evans AC / AM**

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