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From Lord de Mauley

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Natural Environment and Science

Thank you for your letter of 11 November to the Prime Minister about genetic modification (GM). Your letter has been passed to Defra as the Department in the UK responsible for this policy area.

Decisions on the commercial marketing of GM products in European Member States such as the UK are taken at European level. We strongly support the principle that GM products must be assessed for safety on a case-by-case basis, taking full account of the scientific evidence.

Within the EU there is a robust evaluation system based on independent analysis and we believe these controls will ensure that approved GM products are as safe as their non-GM counterparts. Current GM crops have not been developed to provide an intrinsic yield advantage, but are designed to offer farmers other benefits such as easier pest or weed control. We are aware that, in America, some weeds have developed resistance following the widespread use of GM glyphosate-tolerant crops. However, the potential for weed resistance is a normal fact of life in conventional agriculture and therefore it is not an issue specific to GM production. The US experience highlights the general need for prudent crop management, with farmers using a mix of weed control strategies to guard against the build-up of resistance.

We do not expect any commercial planting of GM crops in the UK for at least a few years as no GM crops in the EU approval pipeline are of major interest to UK farmers. However, to pick up on your point on contamination, cross-pollination is, again, a normal process between compatible plant species and there is nothing different about GM crops in this respect.

Before GM crops are grown commercially in the UK the Government will ensure that pragmatic rules are in place to segregate GM and non-GM production, so that choice is facilitated. In the UK, the Government believes people should know what they are buying in



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shops or in restaurants and the EU already requires any approved GM products to be clearly labelled.

Regarding your point on GM seeds, whenever GM seeds have been sold, farmers have generally been happy to buy and continue buying them. GM seeds will only dominate the market if they provide clear and tangible benefits to farmers. We support the principle that farmers should be free to choose whether to adopt GM cultivation.

The UK Government regards safety as paramount and we will only agree to the planting of GM crops or the marketing of GM foods if it is clear that people and the environment will not be harmed.

J Smith

Robert de la Haye