

GM crops 'low risk' for humans

Genetically modified crops pose a "very low" risk to human health, according to an independent scientific review.

A panel of 25 experts said it found no case for ruling out all GM crops in the UK and that the novel plants were unlikely to lead to the creation of "superweeds".



Environmental campaigners are deeply worried about GM crops

But it raised doubts about the effects the new crops could have on the wider environment - particularly wildlife.

Critics, including former environment minister Michael Meacher, argued that GM plants and foods had not been properly tested and it was too soon to say they were safe.

'Knowledge gap'

The GM Science Review Panel said "there have been no verifiable untoward toxic or nutritionally deleterious effects" on human health.

But it did not say they were entirely safe and said more research was needed, particularly as new varieties entered the market.



How a plant is genetically modified

[In pictures](#)

The panel added: "It is clear that gaps in our knowledge and uncertainties will become more complex if the range of plants and traits introduced increases."

Questioning opponents' claims that GM crops could cross-pollinate with existing species to create superweeds, the report said such organisms were "very unlikely to invade our countryside or become problematic plants".

'Case by case'

The UK Government's chief scientific adviser, Sir David King, who chaired the panel, said the report's findings could not be seen as an approval of all GM crops.

“ This committee was deliberately stacked with GM flag-wavers, but its so-called findings still come nowhere

He said: "GM is not a homogenous technology on which scientists can make blanket assurances on safety.

near justifying the risks ”
Greenpeace

"Applications of GM technology will have to be considered on a case by case basis."

Sir David warned against opposing the developments because of a lack of knowledge, arguing that "if we are paralysed by uncertainty, innovation and progress will be stifled".

He continued: "The very best science must be brought to bear on the important decisions that will need to be taken in the future.

"GM technology must not be considered in a vacuum but alongside conventional agricultural and food applications."

'Very serious'

The review was described as a "public scandal" by former environment minister Michael Meacher.

He said GM food could have "very serious" consequences on health and that the tests were not rigorous enough.

Mr Meacher told the BBC: "They say that they have found no evidence that eating GM food causes a health risk but what I think is a public scandal is that no-one has actually looked for the evidence; it is just assumed."

“ **The major environmental impacts of any new or existing crop are determined by how it is managed** ”
Prof Chris Lamb, John Innes Centre

Greenpeace chief scientist Dr Doug Parr said: "This committee was deliberately stacked with GM flag-wavers, but its so-called findings still come nowhere near justifying the risks.

"The report makes it clear there are areas of huge uncertainty."

Crop management

The environmental group called on the government to "admit defeat and halt its headlong rush towards a US-style embrace of GM".

Those working in the biotech sector welcomed what they said was a "measured" and "logical" approach to the issues involved.

Professor Chris Lamb, director of the John Innes Centre, which has made many advances in plant modification, said:
"Through a careful analysis of the scientific evidence this report addresses issues raised by the public about the use of GM in agriculture and food.

"I welcome its clear endorsement of the potential benefits of GM crops and the safety of existing GM foods.

"The report recognises that GM is one crop improvement technology among several, and that the products of all these technologies should be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

"In this context I regret that the report does not make it more clear that the major environmental impacts of any new or existing crop are determined by how it is managed."