



FPC PRESS RELEASE

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Sound science and informed debate needed on GM technology

Both UK consumers and the fresh produce industry need an informed debate on the potential of GM technology to decide if this technology can and should be used to help meet future challenges of sustainable food production. This was the conclusion of an informative and lively debate recently led by the Fresh Produce Consortium.

Opening the discussion Nigel Jenney commented: "It's been disappointing to date to see the lack of any real balanced public debate, and the recent resignations from the Food Standards Agency's Steering Group to oversee this public deliberation are extremely concerning. Let's hope the new Government will inject a bit more vigour into the process and ensure that the public can have greater confidence in the FSA's public engagement exercise."

"The UK horticulture industry already leads in the adoption of integrated pest management systems and FPC will continue to press the UK Government and others to ensure that the industry has the necessary tools to provide a sustainable supply of fresh produce. Within this context we believe that it is important that new technologies including genetically modified products should be considered, but based on sound science, and on a case by case basis, so that informed decisions are taken after full consultation between Government, the industry and consumers."

Dr Julian Little, chair of the Agricultural Biotechnology Council, gave an informative presentation on the current position of the development of GM technology in both the

western world and developing countries, and put in perspective the potential benefits of this technology for horticulture to help meet the challenges of food security. "We must allow innovation into food production and not throw away the potential of GM to help find solutions to the challenges of producing more food for an increasing global population," said Dr Julian Little.

Organic farmer John Clark called for more robust scientific research to be carried out to ensure that any potential side effects of GM on humans and the environment were identified during research. "We cannot afford to allow the entire UK population to be part of a massive experiment; GM technology must be proven to have no adverse effects and if necessary we should slow down the pace of development to ensure that sufficient and thorough independent research is done on the impacts on ourselves and on the environment," commented John Clark.

FPC members and guests debated the possible role of GM to minimise the use of pesticides, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and water consumption. The group discussed how GM might help to meet the challenges of food security and the impacts of climate change, as well as satisfying consumers' needs for health, safe and affordable fresh produce.

"There was a strong consensus that ultimately it will be the consumer who decides whether or not to accept the use of GM technology, but it's evident that a greater understanding of the technology and awareness of the challenges facing food production is needed to inform this much needed public debate," added Nigel Jenney.

The debate took place as part of the FPC's Technical Group meeting kindly hosted by Fera at Sand Hutton, York on Tuesday 8 June.

Ends

Notes for editors:

1. The Fresh Produce Consortium (FPC) is the UK's fresh produce trade association and is based in Peterborough. The FPC has represented the fresh produce sector for many years and is recognised across the UK and EU as the voice of the industry.
2. Extensive membership covers the complete spectrum of industry businesses including growers, importers, wholesalers, retailers, distributors, processors, packers, food service companies and other allied organisations.
3. Dr Little's presentation will be available on request – contact sian@freshproduce.org.uk