



# MACROOM DISTRICT ENVIRONMENTAL GROUP

## THE ENVIRONMENTALIST

2007 Issue 1

[www.mdeg.org](http://www.mdeg.org)

The voice of Ireland's oldest environmental group, established in 1983

### GENETICALLY MODIFIED FOOD AND CROPS

Written by GM-free Ireland network, ([www.gmfreeireland.org](http://www.gmfreeireland.org)) in response to questions by Chris Barrett

**Q. Should I be concerned about the health risks of GM food?**

A. Genetically modified crops typically contain genes from different species including viruses, bacteria, plants and/or animals. These result in novel proteins (not found in conventional food), which our body's immune system cannot recognise. There is now overwhelming scientific evidence of deaths and disease attributable to GM products in laboratory animals and in the human population. Studies prove that modified genes in GM food can survive digestion and become incorporated into the genetic codes of normally harmless bacteria that live inside the human gut. If the gene that causes a GM crop to produce its own pesticide became activated in these bacteria, it could turn you into a living pesticide factory. Despite biotech industry claims, no long-term health studies prove GM foods are safe.

**Q. Do GM crops threaten farmers and the environment?**

A. GM seeds and crops tend to be genetically unstable, may not perform as expected, often require more toxic chemicals, frequently create "superweeds", and can never be recalled after their release. They can contaminate other crops miles away, through pollen blowing on the wind. Food from contaminated crops must carry a GM label. But there is no market for GM food in Europe. The 30 leading EU food brands and 30 leading EU food retailers refuse to sell any food containing GM ingredients. Contaminated farmers may be unable to sell their produce. Insurance companies refuse to provide cover for GM crop risks.

**Q. What about meat, poultry and dairy products from animals fed on a GM-diet?**

A. Most Irish non-organic meat and dairy produce comes from livestock whose feed includes GM maize gluten, GM soyabeans or GM rapeseed. A loophole in EU law allows such produce to be sold without the GM label that is legally required for other GM food. Because leading EU retailers exclude meat, poultry and dairy produce from GM-fed animals, Irish farmers who avoid using GM animal feed are now securing premium prices in

the beef and dairy export markets. For example, the Silver Pail Dairy in North Co. Cork recently struck a multi-million Euro deal with the world's leading chain of ice-cream stores, Baskin-Robbins, to produce Irish GM-free ice-cream for the European market. Two of Ireland's leading beef exporters, the Kepak Group and the Kildare Chilling Company, are getting price premiums for non GM-fed meat. TLT International (based near Mullingar) now exports 15 million Euro worth of non-GM fed live store cattle, mostly to Italy's leading supermarket chain Coop Italia, which has a 100% non-GM food policy.

**Q. Can contaminated farmers get sued for patent infringement?**

A. Most GM crops are patented by giant transnational corporations like Monsanto. Under the World Trade Organisation's Trade-related Intellectual Property Rights agreement, contaminated crops become the property of the patent owner. In the USA and Canada, Monsanto has pursued 9,000 farmers for patent infringement. This appropriation of our natural capital would be the biggest rip-off in the history of the State; a catastrophe for farmers, and the end of our famous green image as Ireland - the food island.

**Q. GM crops prohibited by 175 regional governments & 4,500 local areas in 22 EU member states**

A. GMO seeds, crops and livestock are illegal in Switzerland and prohibited or restricted by 175 regional governments and by over 4,500 local authorities & smaller areas across 22 EU countries because of their health, environmental and economic risks.

**Q. What can I do to protect my community from the threat of GM food and crops?**

A. \* Don't trust our government, which has close ties to the agribiotech industry. Inform yourself. Visit the GM-free Ireland web site at [www.gmfreeireland.org](http://www.gmfreeireland.org). See The Future of Food video / DVD, which you can order with a credit card from [www.thefutureoffood.com](http://www.thefutureoffood.com). Show the DVD to your friends, and arrange to screen it in your community. Groups may borrow the film from MDEG.

\* Ask your local food retailers, restaurants, and schools for a guarantee (a) that their food contains no GM ingredients, and (b) that their meat and dairy produce comes from animals that have been fed a non-GM diet. Support local organic and conventional farmers that you can trust to provide safe food.

\* Write to your Town or County Councillors requesting them to prohibit the transportation and cultivation of GMO seeds, trees, crops, livestock, and fish in your County, and to ban the procurement of GM food in council offices, schools, hospitals etc. Because the Government will dismiss such motions, also ask your County Councillors, TDs and MEPs to sign the EU-wide GMO-free zones petition. This will help empower the Assembly of European Regions to lobby for a new EC Directive that recognises the democratic right of local authorities to ban GM food and crops if they want to.

\* Ask your MEP to always vote in the European Parliament against legalising GM animal feed, seeds, trees, crops, livestock, fish and food. (Ireland has never voted against GM food and crops so far).

\* Join the GM-free Ireland network, sign the Petition to keep Ireland GM-free, or help with a financial donation or volunteer help. For more info, visit [www.gmfreeireland.org](http://www.gmfreeireland.org) or call (0404)43885.

#### OUR MISSION STATEMENT

The Macroom and District Environmental Group is a not-for-profit voluntary organisation that

- \* conserves and protects local nature and heritage for the common good,
- \* supports awareness of interdependency with the natural world,
- \* informs about actions that diminish or enhance nature's capacities,
- \* and promotes for the benefit of all individuals the ideas and practices that yield naturally sustainable prosperity,

Visit our new interactive web-site at [www.mdeg.org](http://www.mdeg.org)

# Environmentally Responsible Investment

by Ted Cook

**As environmentalists, we do need to look at more than just financial criteria when placing our savings with Investment Companies,** be they banks, building societies or the Post Office.

Environmental economist Paul Hawken, recently queried why McDonald's is included in the "Fortune 500 Companies" (Socially Responsible Investment Index). It is so indexed in view of its waste management practices, globally, but Hawken claims that McDonald's is "wasting our children".

The "Ave Maria Fund" ditched Pepsi recently because of that company's provision of healthcare to unmarried couples, but "Ave Maria" does consider arms suppliers in its basket of funds aimed at evangelical Christians.

The "Vice Fund" set up in Texas by Dan Ahrens invests exclusively in tobacco, gambling and weapons, with Lockheed Martin (armaments) in 2005 floating at 13% and the gaming giant MGM Mirage up 25% in the same year. In 2003, the Vice Fund was placed in the top 1% of U.S. funds, with returns exceeding a whopping 34%.

In Europe, the top three companies selected by ethical fund managers, since 2004, are Pfizer, Vodafone and AstraZeneca.

The Dolmen Fund has been found to be the most ethical fund manager – it places savings solely in the 25 companies that are listed on the Natural Stock Index (set up in 1997 by "Oko-Invest" in Austria, and German magazine "Natur").

The Index includes homeopathic products, wind and solar manufacturers, the Body Shop etc. The fund rose by 14% in 2004, and was up 12% in the autumn of 2005.

The Catholic "Aquinas Fund" controls  $\square$ 820 million, and screens out pornography, contraception and abortion.

London's "Real Life Fund" will not place monies in embryonic stem cell research. In the Irish context, the notion of ethical funding has yet to take off, although the Church of Ireland does conduct a review annually of its fund-placements.

In correspondence with the Ecological Building Society in the U.K., this writer discovered that Irish citizens are prohibited from its Ecological Fund.

In correspondence with Allied Irish Banks, I discovered that, not only are eco-investment opportunities absent, but A.I.B. have no plans to introduce such funds in the short term.

The Bank of Ireland has yet to respond to queries raised over a 2-year period concerning investment opportunities that exclude armaments, tobacco etc. (what the U.S. Vice Fund has called "Booze, Bets, Bombs and Butts").

Ethical packages are available in the Republic from Friends First (Stewardship Fund), details of which will be published in our next Newsletter. Hibernian and Dolman Butler Briscoe have also been listed in a recent Irish survey as offering environmental-

ly responsible opportunities which ensure that the goals of the funds respect human rights, avoid animal testing and do not contribute to further "environmental and climactic meltdown".

It was reckoned that, from the (lookalike) wooden cradle to the (lookalike) wooden coffin, we expend about 1.3 million Euro in an average lifetime in Ireland – and that was in the early 1990s.

**Each one of us are provided with choices as to how we target our respective allowances with consequences that impact on the quality of our air, water and soils – on Earth's dwindling resources, on the quality of our relationship with ourselves and with others, and on the safety or otherwise of our Pilgrim Planet that must host and provide for the eternal caravan of Transmigrants.**

## SHOULD I BE WORRIED ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE?

By Martin Barrett

I'd like to make four points: that global warming is undisputed, is happening now and is evident everywhere;

that it could be changing our lives rapidly; that for some reason we are not responding sensibly to the danger; and to suggest what we might do now. The most important thing is realise that we are in great danger, despite the strange impression you might have that things have never been better. The darkest hour is just before the dawn. Conversely, things can look golden and beautiful just before the dark.

There is no serious argument to the fact that global warming is happening. All weather and news services confirm that the global mean temperature has risen by about 0.7C and is rising still, that last year was the hottest recorded and that 2004, 2003 and 2002 were all in the top five. The underlying reason is that there are more greenhouse gases in the atmosphere and as this increases the temperature follows. News reports from around the world tell of the evidence, most graphically in melting ice, around the poles and in mountain glaciers but we know from our own experience that winter in our own country is not what it was when we were children. The figures from Met Eireann show each succeeding month, with the odd exceptions, is warmer than the long-term average. ([www.met.ie/recentweather/monthlydata.asp](http://www.met.ie/recentweather/monthlydata.asp)) and often warmer than the previous year too.

Forecasts indicate that the world may be up to 8C hotter by the end of this century, a change that could be described as catastrophic. Sometime between now and then, changes in the weather are likely to grab everyone's attention, maybe when we join the dots and link up hurricanes, droughts, heatwaves and melting ice into a single picture. Some scientists think we have 10-20

years to contain global warming and limit it to perhaps 2C (thus saving the Greenland ice cap, preventing a 7 metre rise in sea level, and preventing the destruction of most of the world's major ports and several capital cities). But some scientists think it is already too late.

Our lifestyles should be changing before this happens but we and our governments carry on as if normal. Even Tony Blair has said that climate change is the most serious problem the world has, and yet he too has done nothing significant. One problem is that we can't quite believe it but perhaps the main reason is that a rational response challenges the whole economic basis of our civilisation. We can't expect to keep having more, to have second homes, faster cars, weekends in New York; an optimistic view of the future might feature unemployment, bus queues and weekend on the allotment. It might be worse - rationing and a state of emergency look quite possible if we don't plan ahead. It's not surprising we don't want to think about it.

What can we do? There is a limit to how much we can do to individually save ourselves. You can't

run from a global disaster although it seems already that some areas are feeling the heat sooner than others. Retirement on the Costa del Sol might involve more Sol than you'd really like. We need our governments to take this problem seriously but they will only do this when we force them to (why do they call them leaders?), when we indicate with our votes, our letters, our campaigns that they must consider our children's future. There are some things that may save the planet but it will not happen without some co-ordination from the establishment. We need to reduce carbon emissions. To do this effectively would require carbon rationing, with implications for all of us in our use of aeroplanes, car commuting, long distance transport of goods, wasteful consumption of resources and energy wasteful building and farming. The changes that are necessary are not going to come about without disturbing our rosy view of continuous growth and progress. It won't be easy but it is preferable to meeting reality head-on.

We need to convince the government and those with any influence that things need to change. Our government can produce long-term plans for a motorway network, or a doubling of Dublin airport, but they can't seem to see what is coming. We must change this.

It is said that if you drop a frog in a pan of boiling water he will jump straight out, indignantly but if you put the frog in cold water and bring it to the boil he might stay until unconsciousness overtakes him. Are we being boiled and failing to notice?

MDEG meets monthly.  
Contact Donal at 087 7409304  
for details, or for  
general queries.