

Getting active

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Help your local council become a GE-free zone

Local councils have the power to declare themselves GE-free. This can be implemented in two ways:

- By passing a council motion that no GE crops are to be grown in the shire and requesting that the State government declare the shire a GE-free zone;
- By requiring all council food services to only source foods which are GE-free throughout the food chain (see GE-free Food Services).

The Environmental Defenders Office (www.edo.org.au) has prepared some legal advice about council powers to enforce GE-free zones, with regards to crops and food services. Greenpeace is also collating a (far from comprehensive) list of GE-free councils. We welcome additions — please contact Greenpeace for copies of these documents.

GE-free crop shires

The legal powers of councils to stop genetically engineered crops from being grown in their area has yet to be tested. A variety of legal options exist in local government laws, and there are provisions in the Gene Technology Act 2000, which are required to be respected by the Regulator when issuing GE crop licences.

However, it seems that GE-free zones are only able to be designated by State governments — for purposes of marketing and only with reference to the growing of GE crops. For this reason it is important to encourage local councils to not only object to applications to grow GE crops in their area, but also to lobby State governments to create GE-free zones under state law.

The symbolic power of a council declaring themselves GE-free, should not however be underestimated. Historically, these stances have forced agro-chemical companies like Monsanto to abort plans to conduct field trials in a particular shire. Such stances also make it politically difficult for State Ministers to justify overriding the wish of an entire shire, for the sake of a profit-seeking company.

The actual text of the motion you pass in a local council context can take many different forms. With the State mirror legislation of the Federal Gene Technology Act being passed in each State, it is useful to find out which wording will have the strongest legal force in your State. In WA for example, it seems as if growing GE crops cannot be 'prohibited', but an area can be 'designated to be non-GE for marketing purposes'.

GE-free zones (especially in potential GE crop growing areas) are an important step to stopping the release of GE crops not only in your local area, but also in the States. Lobbying the State government to legislate for the establishment of GE-free zones as well as actually designating them is absolutely crucial to their establishment.

Stopping GE in your own backyard

While cotton and carnations are currently the only commercial GE crop grown in Australia (and an application for GE Canola is looming), there are a large number of field trials — often growing near our own backyard. These trial crops are in fact grown in open air on farmland. They are thus able to contaminate both the wider environment and other farmers' fields although their acreage might be smaller than commercial crops.

Bringing attention to GE crops in your local area can help the campaign against GE in a number of different ways:

- bringing the GE debate 'into the backyard' — to give local context and connection;
- grounding scientific or futuristic pro-GE arguments in real-life environmental issues;
- providing inspiration to get out and about, leaving computers and papers behind!;
- empowering people to take proactive, positive responsibility for their local environs.
- Declaring your opposition to GE crops and follow up with letters, statements or petitions to the local council to lobby State parties as they have the power to declare GE-free zones.

Some ideas for local field activities include:

- **Find out if there are any GE field trials or commercial crops** in your area, by calling the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator (OGTR) on 1800 181 030; by calling your local council; or by searching the field trial map on the OGTR website at <http://www.ogtr.gov.au/gmorecord/maps.htm>
- **Spread the word** about local field trials and commercial crops, by writing a letter to the editor of your local paper; advising the local council; holding a public meeting; or forming a group of concerned citizens.
- **Contact your local councillor or MP** as in many cases they don't know there are GE crops in their shire. Lobby them for a ban of GE crops in your shire;
- **Monitor the field** for any breaches of regulations (eg: breaches of buffer zones, lack of signage, testing for outcrossing of GE crops to neighbouring fields, roadsides or the native bush). Establish a rotational monitoring system with local community members;
- **Organise a field event** with your group of concerned citizens. Invite local people and the media to attend (see Supermarket Activist Kit and Media Checklist for tips). At the event you could:
 - **Hold an information session** about GE crops (invite guest speakers or experts);
 - **Present a theatre piece**, invite musicians, comedians, poetry, book reading, games;

- **Hold a GE-free or organic picnic** to celebrate the value of organic food which is healthy for us, our kids and the environment;
- **Talk with the farmer** growing the GE crop about the risks of GE. Provide him/her with written information, to let them know you are opposed to GE and why (remember that many farmers may not know the problems of GE, as they are often only told of the alleged benefits of GE crops. Some farmers didn't even know that the trial crop they were growing was GE!);
- **Empower other farmers** in the area. Talk with farming neighbours and those growing conventional or organic crops, to publicly state and inform their neighbours that they do not want their crop to be contaminated by GE. Farmers can send legal letters to their neighbours expressing their right to sue the GE farmer, should GE crops contaminate their farms. For more information for farmers, go to www.non-gm-farmers.com;
- **Organise field days or trips** to other GE commercial or trial fields, as well as conventional or organic farms. Invite local people and those from nearby townships to share information on GE crops and sustainable alternatives.

When planning local activities you should always consider:

- What is the objective of the activity?
- Who is the audience of the activity?
- How can you communicate the activity to your audience?
- How are the local media likely to portray the event?
- Are there any potential adverse consequences? (eg alienating sections of the community, impacts on the local environment, safety risks etc.)

There are endless possibilities in taking GE action 'in your own backyard' – monitoring the farming activities of your local rural areas. Forging connections with the land, with farmers and with rural people can provide powerful and lasting changes in our efforts to create a future that is GE-free from paddock to plate.

GE-free universities

University students play a special role in social change. Whether opposing war in the sixties, the IMF in Papua New Guinea, or as drivers of the successful Jabiluka campaign, students often mobilise with a sense of power, hope and vision for a better world. This also holds true for the campaign against genetically engineered food and crops. Universities themselves may well be vital in this campaign, as:

- universities teach genetic engineering in their syllabus and thus set the tone for the next generation of scientists working on this issue;
- universities conduct their own research in this area, theoretically and practically;
- driven by a lack of government funding for independent research, universities often enter into sponsorship arrangements with multinational corporations;
- university unions provide food for thousands of people every day;
- universities are meeting points for thousands of people every day.

Campus activities

Serving GE-free food

Universities are a major provider of food services. Encouraging university food services to go GE-free them to require food where genetically engineered organisms have not been part of the food chain (including refined ingredients, animal products from animals fed on GE animal feed). See "*GE-free Food Services*" on how to go about it.

Most unions already have requirements in their contract not to conduct any business which might have harmful effects on the environment or on people. If your Union has nothing to that respect, lobby for it and ask other universities how they went about it (eg Sydney Uni or Macquarie University).

Specify that GE food has the potential to harm the environment and as well as the health of people and that Unions have a responsibility towards their high volume of customers to provide GE-free food.

Find out if any GE research is being done at your university, who's funding it and what will happen with the results (eg does the company get patents out it which it can exploit? Are there any other stakeholders who might not have been included? Eg the university, indigenous people, any other communities).

- **Critique curricula dealing with GE**
Whether agriculture, economics, social sciences, biological, chemical and environmental sciences, but especially food technology, make sure that alternative views are also articulated, so the GE propaganda machine doesn't spit out another generation of genetic determinists!
- **Find out if the laboratories** are adhering to containment requirements and publicise the ineffectiveness of the regulations if transgenic DNA could escape into the environment via the earthen floors, air vents, waste disposal...
- **How much money is the university investing** in genetic engineering?
Ask why this money isn't invested in much needed other departments of the university! Get other students and staff onside who agree that the money should rather be spent on immediate needs than on a "magic-bullet technology" which hasn't proven its promises, but rather give rise to grave concerns. Even just economically speaking, the industry and its commercial applications are in troubled waters because consumer rejection is so high. So the investment is a high risk for a public body to take.
- **Find lecturers, especially scientists who support the campaign** and (ideally) are happy to say so publicly! Let us know if you do...
- **Find out if there are any glasshouses or field trials** the university is involved in or planning. Tell them it is irresponsible to use public money this way considering all the risks and no benefit to the community!
- **Check out "Field Activities"** to find what you could do when visiting your closest GE field which might even be run by your very own university!
- **Organise a field day** or tour to an organic farm, permaculture property or community garden to learn about how they are the solutions to the threats GE is presenting. You could find out if there are any specific farmers who would be happy to explain why GE is such a threat to them.
- **Organise discussions on the various aspects of GE** during the midday break or at night. Combine it with a movie, docu, band, theatre...
- **Encourage** greater exchange and connection between academics and students.
- **Write articles in your uni-paper** about GE and how to get active on campus.
- **Organise a 1800-day** where you meet (in your lunch break eg) and organise for everyone to ring the 1800 numbers of big companies and supermarkets from the public phone booths! (You don't have to know much about it to tell them that you won't buy their products if they contain GE in the food chain. The customer service person won't know much either, but will register your call!)
- **Organise letter writing stalls** telling companies you won't eat their GE-food!
- **Check out the *Supermarket Activist Kit*** on what supermarket activism you can do individually, with your collective! Great hints on how to form your own group!

Students fighting the corporate control of our food supply!

Contact details for other groups and individuals active on GE in Australia

Please let us know if you're happy to be included as well, so we can all work together for a GE-free Australia from Paddock to Plate!

Name	Email	Postal address	Phone / web
QLD			
Cairns and Far North Environment Centre (CAFNEC)	cafnecc@cafnecc.org.au	CAFNEC, PO Box 323N, North Cairns, QLD, 4870	www.cafnecc.org.au/ tel 07 4032 1746
Friends of the Earth Brisbane, Derec Davies	foebrisbane@uq.net.au	PO Box 5702, West End Qld 4101, 294 Montague Rd, West End	www.brisbane.foe.org.au tel 07 3846 5793
Greenpeace Brisbane Local Group, Nola MacCauley	brisbanelocalgroup@au.greenpeace.org		tel 07 3321 1117 / 0421 045 541
NSW			
Australian Community Foods, John Brisbin	johnb@communityfoods.com.au	6 Parkinson St, Wollongong, NSW, 2500	www.communityfoods.com.au tel 02 4227 5600
Greenpeace Sydney Local Group, Adrian Wedd	sydneylocalgroup@au.greenpeace.org		tel 0407 081 084
GeneEthics Sydney, Diane Davie	dianedavie@bigpond.com		
Mark Graham, regional committee opposing GE Canola	mark.graham@chcc.nsw.gov.au	Coffs Harbour, Terrestrial Ecologist	mob 0438917364
Residents against GE Springwood, Tanya DeBortoli		11, Coomonderry St, Katoomba, 2780	tel 02 47 829924
Graham Strong, Broadacre wheat & canola farmer/GE activist		Narrandera NSW	tel 02 69598656 / 0428598656
ACT			
Greenpeace Canberra Local Group, Amy Land	canberralocalgroup@au.greenpeace.org		tel 0404 019 638
VIC			
Australian Gene Ethics Network, Bob Phelps	Info@geneethics.org	C/ ACF, 340 Gore St, Fitzroy, Vic 3065	www.geneethics.org tel 03 9416 2222
Bentleigh-Bayside Gene Alert, Campaign for Safe Food, Kim	bbga_safefoodcampaign@hotmail.com	PO Box 2336 Moorabbin 3189 VIC	
Greenpeace Melbourne Local Group,	melbournelocalgroup@au.greenpea		

James Gormley	ce.org			(03) 9482 2241
GE-free Friends of Yarra (GEFFY), Glenda Lindsay	homeplanet@ozemail.com.au			
People for Safe Food, Air and Water, Contact Gillian Blair	gillianb@standard.net.au	SW VIC Warrnambool, 1 hr from Portland, 1 hr from Hamilton		tel 03 5567 6273
Bendigo GE Free Group, Gill Rosler	grosier@origin.net.au	Lockwood South Post Office Lockwood South 3551.		Phone (03) 5435 3037
TAS				
Greenpeace Hobart Local Group, Jonathon Cooper	hobartlocalgroup@au.greenpeace.org			tel 0422 937 057
GE-free Tasmania	gefreetas@hotmail.com			www.green.net.au/gefreetasma nla/links.html tel 0418 564 019
SA				
GE Free Australia	sandra@atccm.net	3/297 Montacute Road, Newton, SA 5074		www.gefreeaustralia.com tel 08 8365 0811
Greenpeace Adelaide Local Group, Josephine Robinson	adelaidelocalgroup@au.greenpeace.org			tel 08 8411 2020
South Australian Genetic Food Information Network SAGFIN, Kate Clinch-Jones	avalon@chariot.net.au	PO Box 7 Dernancourt SA 5075		tel 08 8261 5222
WA				
Greenpeace Perth Local Group, Jason Collins	perthlocalgroup@au.greenpeace.org			tel 08 9487 7580 or 0428 689 818
Gene Ethics Network (Perth), Contact Emily Wallis	emilyw@upnaway.com.au	PO Box 92, Innaloo City WA 6918		tel 08 9245 2639
Environs Kimberley, Contact Maria Mann	envrkimb@broome.wt.com.au	PO Box 309 Broome WA 6725		tel 08 9192 1922
Network of Concerned Farmers, Julie Newman	newseeds@treko.net.au	P.O. Box 6, Newdegate, 6355 WA		www.non-gm-farmers.com tel 08 98711562
NT				
GE-free Northern Territory	gefreet_nt@yahoo.com.au			