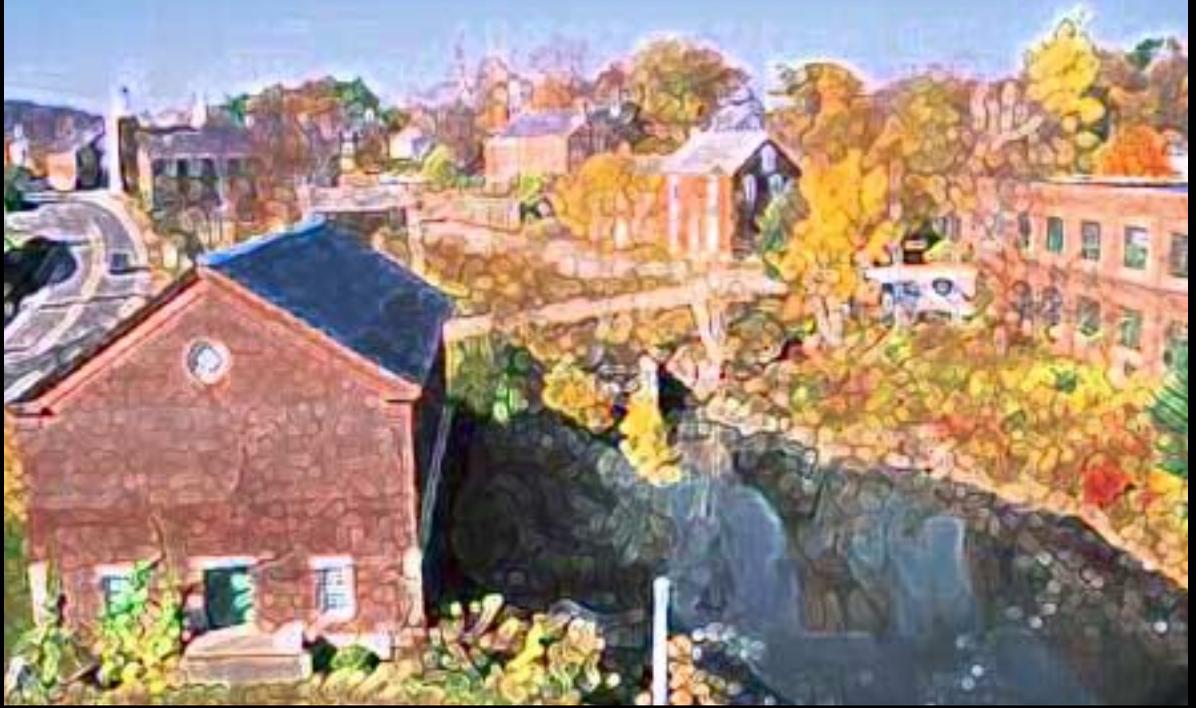


Vermont Towns vs. Genetic Engineering

A guide to reclaiming
our democracy

Revised Edition



Ten Steps Toward Passing a Resolution in Your Town

1. Contact the ISE Biotech Project office to get names of others in your area, and for ongoing resources and support.
2. Contact your Town Clerk to find out how many signatures you need (5% of your town's registered voters), and when to submit your signatures (usually mid- to late-January).
3. Confirm your petition wording, and print petitions in the proper format (or ask us to print some for you).
4. Begin collecting signatures, and find others to help.
5. Gather friends and allies to help plan your effort, whether at a potluck dinner in your home, or in a public place.
6. Educate yourself and others about genetic engineering. Consider organizing an educational forum or film showing, perhaps together with folks from nearby towns.
7. Practice public speaking with your friends, or at trainings organized to support the campaign.
8. Communicate with farmers in your town, to assess their concerns and seek their support.
9. Learn about Town Meeting process, plan your presentation, and prepare for any unexpected circumstances or issues that may arise.
10. Report the results of your Town Meeting vote to the ISE Biotech Project office, along with the final language that passed in your town.



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Special thanks to Heather Albert-Knopp,
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original materials adapted for this edition.

Introduction: Towns vs. Genetic Engineering

Over the past few years, there has been a revival of interest in Town Meeting as a place to debate issues of concern to Vermont voters. As the federal government has become ever more unresponsive to the needs of ordinary citizens, people have embraced this vital institution of local democracy as a setting where we *can* make a difference. From problems of civil liberties (the so-called “Patriot” Act), to the deployment of National Guard troops in Iraq, to healthcare and the need for alternative energy sources, Vermont’s Town Meetings have become an increasingly vital forum for expressing popular dissent from a corporate-dominated status-quo.

The genetic manipulation of our food is one of the key issues where Vermont towns have taken a firm stand. Between 2000 and 2005, 83 towns passed resolutions critical of genetic engineering, seeking labeling of genetically engineered (GE) foods, a moratorium on their growing, and liability protection for farmers from genetic contamination. This effort has dramatically raised the profile of these issues in our communities, and helped spur the passage of a first-in-the-nation GE seed labeling law in 2004. Now, with liability legislation stalled in the State House, and politicians maneuvering to keep the idea of a GE moratorium off the state’s policy agenda, it is time again for local action!

Vermont’s annual Town Meetings, held every year on the first Tuesday in March, are among the oldest surviving institutions of direct democracy in the United States. Tracing their origins to well before the American Revolution, these annual face-to-face meetings are the setting where residents of 246 Vermont towns debate their annual budgets, planning and zoning

issues, grants to social service agencies, and all major purchases. Since the Nuclear Weapons Freeze campaigns of the 1980s, our towns have made national headlines, raising issues that have been largely excluded from mainstream political debate, and sometimes altering the terms of that debate. While state laws have significantly eroded the power of Town Meeting in recent decades, town votes still carry substantial moral weight, are featured in local media, and can spur real changes in state policy.

The Town-to-Town Campaign on Genetic Engineering began in earnest in 2002, when residents of 31 Vermont towns gathered petition signatures to add the issues of genetically engineered food and crops to their Town Meeting agendas. The resolutions generally included language stating that genetically engineered (GE) foods cause long-term damage to the environment, family farms, and human health. Most resolutions called upon state legislators and the Vermont congressional delegation to support labeling of GE foods and seeds, as well as a moratorium on the growing of GE crops.

That first year, 28 towns passed some version of this resolution, including the state capital of Montpelier, where the measure passed by a 2-1 margin in the city election. Two towns tabled the resolution, and only the town of Rochester, in the southern Green Mountains, defeated it. Eight towns called for halting the growing of engineered crops within their towns, whether by declaring a town moratorium or urging that the planting of GE seeds be actively discouraged within the town.

In subsequent years, the number of Vermont towns on record in opposition to GE foods and crops has grown to 83, and people in Massachu-

setts, Maine and New Hampshire have launched similar efforts, bringing the number of town resolutions New England-wide up to 98. Major cities such as Boston, San Francisco, Denver, Cleveland and Minneapolis have also passed resolutions critical of genetic engineering. In 2003, Mendocino County in California became the first county in the United States to prohibit the raising of GE crops, trees and animals. Agribusiness companies spent \$700,000 to try to defeat that initiative, but the proponents of safe, local food prevailed, and two other California counties have since followed suit.

Despite the mainly advisory nature of Vermont town resolutions, they have also met with some organized opposition. The Vermont Farm Bureau and the Vermont Grocers' Association—state chapter of the aggressively pro-agribusiness Grocery Manufacturers of America—sent mailings to every town council, or “selectboard,” in 2002 discouraging debate on the issue. This may be the first time that pro-corporate lobbyists have actively intervened in a statewide Town Meeting vote. Several town debates have raged on for an hour or more, with impassioned voices heard on both sides, but nearly all of the anti-GE resolutions that have been proposed have passed by overwhelming margins.

The materials in this booklet are offered with a hope of encouraging and energizing further local action against genetically engineered foods. We have included some of the key organizing materials, sample resolutions and other useful information. We hope this information will help spur another round of successful local organizing in Vermont, throughout New England, and across the country.

The Vermont Town-to-Town Campaign on Genetic Engineering has confirmed what GE opponents have been saying for a long time- that the more people know about genetically engineered food, the more they oppose it. We believe that Vermont's Town Meetings are still a place where people's real concerns can take clear precedence over outside corporate interests. And we hope that our experiences will prove useful for people working in other municipal settings as well.

— Brian Tokar,
Institute for Social Ecology
Biotechnology Project,
October 2005



A Brief History of the Campaign

In the summer of 2001, residents of the southern Vermont towns of Guilford and Dummerston brought resolutions calling for labeling, regulation and a moratorium on GE foods to their town selectboards (councils, originally the Board of Selectmen). Both of these resolutions passed and were prominently featured in the local press. Soon after, the all-volunteer Brattleboro Genetic Engineering Action Group (GEAG) presented their report at a regular meeting of our statewide network, the Vermont Genetic Engineering Action Network (VT-GEAN), generating considerable excitement. Participants were reminded of successful Town Meeting resolutions on genetic engineering in the town of Starksboro during the past two years, as well as a 2000 City Council resolution on GE in the city of Burlington.

Activists from the Institute for Social Ecology's Biotechnology Project and other groups proposed that the VT-GEAN network take its inspiration from these successful efforts and launch a campaign to help citizens bring resolutions on genetic engineering to selectboards and Town Meetings throughout Vermont. This idea got an enthusiastic response from everyone at the meeting. Participating groups and individuals agreed to make this a major focus for the coming fall and winter seasons.

The Town Meeting campaign was featured at several major events that fall, including the second annual Fertile Ground Festival on Vermont's State House lawn, and a day of workshops on grassroots organizing and community building cosponsored by the ISE Biotechnology Project, VT-GEAN and the Native Forest Network. People from all over Vermont agreed to obtain signatures from the required five percent

of their towns' registered voters' to get the issue onto their Town Meeting agenda, known as the "warning." Scores of people worked to finalize resolution wording, gather signatures, track down answers to legal questions, and create organizing materials. By the January petition deadline, people in 31 towns had obtained the signatures needed to warn a resolution on genetically engineered food and seeds. In three or four local areas, people from several towns banded together to collect signatures in several towns within their region.

Realizing that the support of local farmers would be an important element of this campaign, activists from the Brattleboro group drafted a support letter for farmers to sign on to. Rural Vermont, based in Montpelier, sent the letter out with their quarterly farm policy newsletter, and received nearly eighty signatures in response. People in various towns were encouraged to work closely with farmers and discuss their concerns. Several towns held successful public forums featuring local farmers opposed to genetic engineering, along with critical scientists, activists and concerned citizens.

We also organized a series of Mock Town Meetings around the state in early February, featuring questions and answers on GE issues, reports from activist farmers, exercises in public speaking, and a Town Meeting role play. We invited town moderators and legislators (past and present) to describe Town Meeting process (Robert's Rules of Order), act as moderators in the role play, and help us think through strategies for organizing during the weeks leading up to Town Meeting Day.

Also in February, as towns began posting the warnings (agendas) for their Town Meetings,

we learned that three towns had deleted all or part of the proposed resolution, even though sufficient signatures had been submitted. We discovered that the Secretary of State's office had been advising towns that warning petitioned items was optional, and was questioning language calling for a moratorium on growing GE crops inside the town. Working with a Legal Aid lawyer we began to investigate the precedents and discovered a 1990 case affirming that towns are indeed obliged to warn duly petitioned articles.

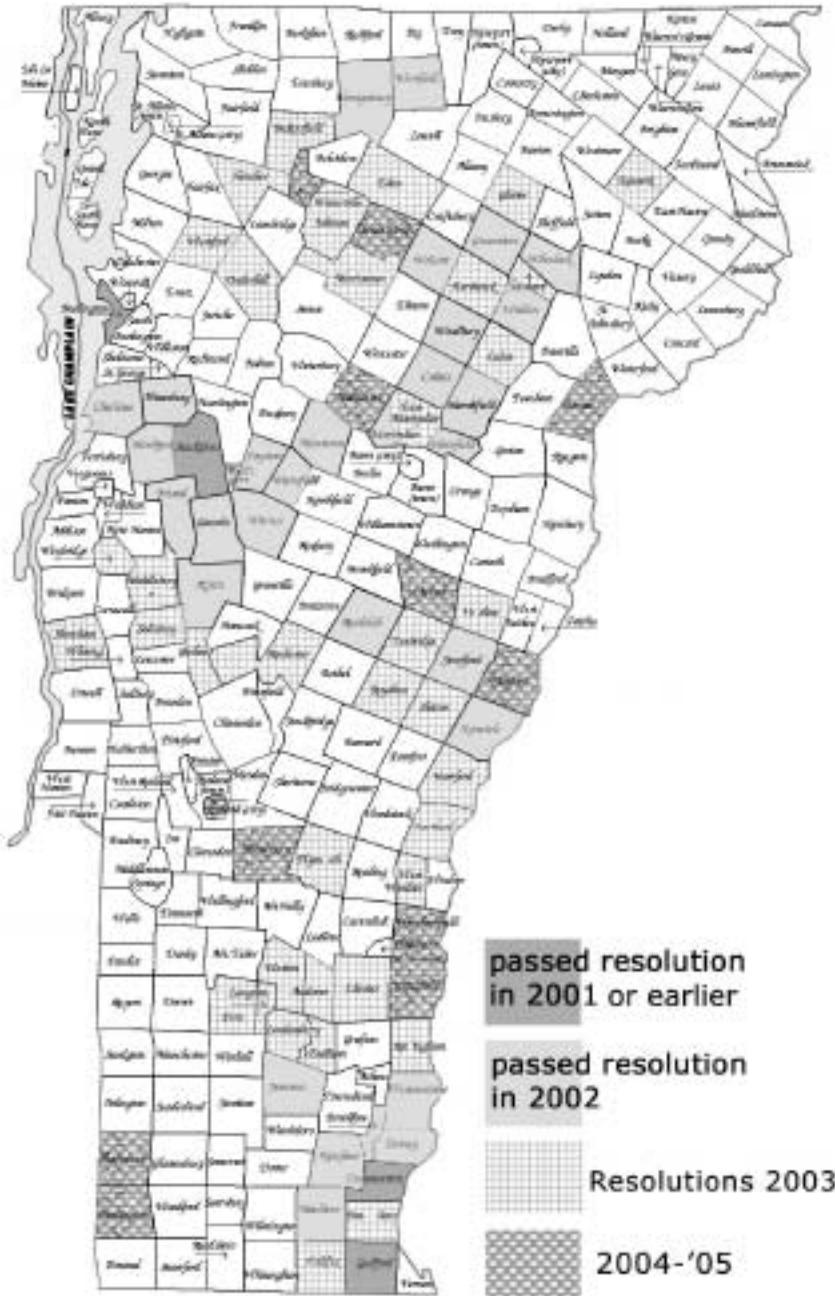
Organizers tried to come to terms with the largely advisory character of Vermont Town Meeting debates. Even though Vermonters take tremendous pride in our Town Meetings, towns do not have the same home rule rights that are granted to municipalities and counties in many other states. In some towns, activists dropped the local moratorium language from their petitions, or replaced it with language "actively discouraging" the growing of GE crops in their town. We discovered that the Vermont Farm Bureau and the Vermont Grocers Association had sent mailings to all town selectboards discouraging the warning of the anti-GE resolutions. Their intervention was clearly intended to suppress public debate on this issue. This controversy, however, attracted the interest of major statewide newspapers, giving the campaign heightened press coverage all over Vermont.

Town Meeting Day brought some rousing and highly energized debates. In the end, eight towns passed some language calling for action within the town. Some town debates lasted over an hour, and in the end only one out of 31 anti-GE resolutions—in Rochester, Vermont—was voted down. (Rochester passed their resolution the following year.) Two of the resolutions were successfully tabled by opponents, and the remainder passed overwhelmingly, usually with resounding voice votes. Organizers with the ISE

Biotechnology Project and other groups worked to tabulate the results and catalog the language of the many different resolutions that had passed. We made an extensive collection of news clippings, and shared experiences to create an even stronger effort the following year.

The 2003 Town-to-Town Campaign was a true coalition effort, bringing together organizers from the ISE, Windham County GEAG, VT-GEAN and Rural Vermont, together with dedicated volunteers from across the state. We brought Percy Schmeiser—the Canadian farmer who had been sued by Monsanto after his canola crop was contaminated by the company's GE canola—for a week-long tour featuring many standing-room-only events, a Vermont Public Radio debate, and meetings with farmers at local granges. VT-GEAN began organizing regional "hubs" to help coordinate signature gathering in various parts of the state, and the issue of farmer liability became an important part of that year's resolutions. After 38 additional towns passed resolutions in 2003, the Vermont Senate began seriously considering a bill to require labeling and registration of genetically engineered seeds. The bill was eventually passed into law and signed by a reluctant Governor Douglas in April of 2004.

In the fall of 2003, Agriculture Secretary Steven Kerr began an initiative designed to shift the focus of debate from labeling and a moratorium to "coexistence" between GE crop growers and non-GE growers. With the support of Rural Vermont and Vermont NOFA (Northeast Organic Farming Association), we were able to expose the myth of "coexistence," clarify that coexistence equals contamination with respect to the highly unstable products of GE technology, and push for action on seed labeling as a first step toward a moratorium, or "Time Out," on GE crops. During the summer of 2004, over a thousand bright red lawn signs calling for a Time Out on GMOs



(genetically modified organisms) were distributed and displayed all over the state.

In 2004 and 2005, the attention of Vermont's GE activists was largely focused on the Legislature, first with the seed labeling bill, and later with the effort to legislate strict liability for GE seed developers and manufacturers, removing the burden from our farmers (the Farmer Protection Act). Activists in an additional twelve towns passed resolutions on GE food and crops, bringing the statewide total to 83 towns. These included major regional centers such as Bennington, Rutland, and Springfield, a majority of Vermont's Connecticut Valley towns, and significant clusters in Windham County, the Winooski and Lamoille Valleys, and the northern Green Mountains.

Today, with farmer protection legislation still pending in the State House, new GE varieties of crops such as alfalfa, grasses and trees on the horizon, and corporate power thoroughly dominant in Washington, the urgency of local action to protect our food and farms is stronger than ever. Please join us!

Genetically engineered crops in Vermont: What are the facts?

The latest information from the Vermont Agency of Agriculture suggests that approximately 20 percent of the field corn grown in Vermont is genetically engineered (less than half the national average). This represents some 17,000 acres of corn. Combined estimates from the Agency and the UVM Extension Service suggest that as many as 2500 acres of GE soybeans are also grown here.

Can we trust these figures?

That's uncertain. In 2003, Agriculture Secretary Steven Kerr began asking each company that supplies Vermont seed dealers to voluntarily report what proportion of their seeds sold in Vermont were GE. The results were confusing and contradictory. In April 2003, the Agency reported that 44 percent by weight of all the seeds sold in Vermont were genetically engineered, then halved that figure in May. In early 2005, the Agency announced that GE seed sales had tripled. Then, they released revised numbers for 2002 that revealed a decline in GE corn in Vermont over 3 years. Clearly, we need effective enforcement of Vermont's GE seed labeling and registration law.

What kind of GE crops are being grown?

Reports from farmers confirm that the majority of the GE corn and all of the GE soybeans are engineered to resist chemical herbicides, such as Monsanto's Roundup. These are known as "Roundup Ready" seeds. The rest of the corn is engineered to produce a bacterial toxin that is deadly to insect pests, particularly the European corn borer. Studies suggest that it is also harmful to beneficial insects and soil microbes.

Do GMOs benefit farmers?

While some farmers report a small reduction

in chemical herbicide or insecticide use in the short term, it appears that the longer a farmer uses GE seeds, the fewer benefits remain. National data from the US Department of Agriculture confirms this: in the late 1990s, pesticide use declined slightly among farmers raising GMOs. But by 2003, GMOs were responsible for a large net increase in pesticide use (122 million pounds nationwide¹). With herbicide-tolerant GE crops, farmers can spray high doses of weed killers throughout the growing season, convenient for some farmers, but a serious problem for food safety and the environment.

What does the future hold?

Biotechnology companies like Monsanto and Bayer are developing engineered varieties of rice, wheat, oilseeds and vegetables, as well as grasses and trees. Monsanto recently purchased Seminis Seeds, the largest producer of vegetable seeds in the Americas. A GE variety of alfalfa, a perennial crop important to many farmers, has been approved and will be sold to Western farmers in 2006. GE grasses and trees would have far more damaging environmental consequences than today's GE crops. Also, companies across the US are experimenting with GE crops that produce pharmaceuticals, vaccine components, and industrial chemicals; these represent a whole new magnitude of hazards to our food supply.

We need a moratorium on the growing of GMOs in Vermont before these new experimental GE varieties wreak even more havoc on our health, environment, and farms.

¹Charles M. Benbrook, *Genetically Engineered Crops and Pesticide Use in the United States: The First Nine Years*, BioTech InfoNet Technical Paper Number 7, October 2004, available from www.biotech-info.net.

Organizing your campaign: Step-by-step

Organizing to pass a resolution in your town can be as engaging or as simple as time and energy allows. Please adapt these steps to your own particular situation:

- **Contact the ISE Biotechnology Project office** (802-454-7138, biotech@social-ecology.org) to see who else in your area has been active on GE issues. Start building a network of people to work with you. You may want to consult with people who have organized around other issues in your community and get advice from them.
- **Consult your Town Clerk** to find out how many signatures you need to get an issue onto your town warning (agenda). This will be 5 percent of the registered voters in your town. Also confirm the deadline by which signatures need to be submitted; this is usually around the *third week in January* (approximately 6 weeks before Town Meeting Day). The ISE office can provide petition forms that are laid out in the proper format, with places for printed name, street address, signature, and optional information from those who want to help out.
- **Choose your resolution wording.** This booklet offers a variety of examples and more are available from the ISE office. In a few Vermont towns, the selectboard has modified or deleted language that they believed was outside the town's jurisdiction. Even though Vermont town selectboards are obligated by state law to warn all resolutions brought forth by citizen petitions, so long as they do not contradict state law.
- **Start gathering signatures.** It's important to get some help with this. Seek out others in your community who can help with signature gathering, and also help present the resolution on Town Meeting Day.



Reviewing the agenda at East Montpelier Town Meeting. *Photo: Times-Argus*

- **Map out the best locations for petitioning** in your town, such as local co-ops and other food stores, the Post Office (where feasible), coffee shops, and other well-traveled public places. Petitions posted on bulletin boards are helpful to start, but it usually requires a more person-to-person approach to obtain 5 percent. Get as much help as you can, and try not to leave the bulk of petitioning for the coldest part of January!

continued on next page →

Campaign steps, continued

- **Hold a community meeting** to plan your effort. Try to attract a diversity of participants, including local farmers, perhaps by holding a potluck dinner. It may be appropriate to arrange visits to local farms to discuss the issues.
- **Educate yourself and others** about genetic engineering. Assemble a packet of information that you can hand out to people when you're gathering signatures. If you need materials, review the resources listed on the back cover of this booklet, and feel free to contact the ISE office for more. It is often helpful to discuss your petition with selectboard members in advance of submitting a petition.
- **Make sure you and people you know are registered to vote** in your city or town. Have voter registration materials readily available.
- **Practice speaking** about GMO issues. We will hold Mock Town Meetings in several locations during the winter to help people prepare for Town Meeting Day.

Once your signatures are submitted . . .

After you have submitted signatures and received confirmation that the resolution will be discussed by your town, city, or placed on the ballot, the excitement has only just begun! The weeks leading up to a vote or Town Meeting Day present unparalleled opportunities for public outreach, education and discussion about genetic engineering and how it affects us and our communities. Please consider the following ideas for raising public awareness as you prepare to present your resolution in public.

- **Call your friends** or interested petition signers to remind them to attend any public meetings where your resolution will be discussed. Encourage the most talkative and articulate ones to help you present the resolution! When the time comes, it will be nice to know that there are other people on your side and you won't be alone in responding to criticisms that may arise. *If you were unable to collect enough signatures, you may still be able to raise the issue at Town Meeting under 'New Business.'*
- **Communicate with farmers.** It is helpful to inform local farmers (organic and conventional) of the resolution before Town Meeting Day, whether or not you think they will support it. This way you are able to present the issues in your own words, and also give farmers the opportunity to discuss their questions, concerns, or support. Depending on your comfort level, you can approach farmers in your community in a number of ways: call them

to talk about the resolution; arrange an in-person visit; write them a letter describing the resolution, and soliciting their suggestions; organize a meeting for farmers in your town to discuss the resolution and its implications with your organizing group and with each other.

- **Collect letters of support** from sympathetic farmers and other influential people. If you meet farmers in your town who are supportive of your resolution, ask them to write or sign a letter of support that you can bring to public meetings. If they are outspoken about their views, ask them to help present or defend the resolution on Town Meeting Day.

- **Write letters to the editor.** Local newspapers provide a great forum for introducing your resolution and the issues around genetic engineering to a wider public. Encourage supporters to submit letters to all of the daily and weekly papers in your area. Send copies of letters and articles to the ISE office.

- **Hold a public forum.** One of the best ways to educate people and alert them to your resolution is to organize a public event. Many towns in Vermont have held panel discussions and film showings; both are good vehicles for organizing and for presenting the many ways that GE impacts our lives. Present your opinions openly and comfortably and invite discussion on the issue. Make sure that people know about the resolution or article that is coming up for a vote, and how they can get involved with the organizing process. The ISE has several films on GE issues that we can loan out for local events. Hold a GE-free dessert party and video showing at your home or in a public meeting place. If you'd rather not organize an event, post information on genetic engineering in central public places (general stores, post offices, natural food stores, health clinics and food co-ops).



Listening to comments from the balcony at Plainfield Town Meeting. *Photo: Times-Argus*

- **Notify local media.** Seek out potentially sympathetic reporters and pitch them the story. Or send press releases to your weekly newspapers, radio stations, and other local media. A press release can include a brief description of the resolution, a sentence about your connection to regional and national efforts, and some concise statements about the problems with genetic engineering. If you write your press release in the form of a news story,

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More campaign steps

some of the smaller local papers may choose to print it as submitted. Local talk shows and radio news programs often have large and active listenerships.

- **Learn about Town Meeting process.** Consult with folks experienced with your town’s meeting procedures and learn the basics of how to work with Robert’s Rules of Order. Several accessible guides on Robert’s Rules are available, including a flyer produced by the Vermont Institute for Government, and available from <http://crs.uvm.edu/citizens> (“The Meeting Will Come to Order: A Voter’s Guide to Town Meeting Procedure”). We also have cartoon booklets available that explain Robert’s Rules in a simple step-by-step fashion.
- **Develop a strategy** to deal with potential opposition. Be prepared for people opposing your article or resolution at your Town Meeting or public forum. Before any decision-making meeting, in addition to familiarizing yourself with information to counter popular arguments, you may want to consider compromise positions and alternative wordings (to make the resolution shorter, change potentially contentious wording, etc.) Have this language ready before town meeting so that you can quickly add it to the debate on the floor in the interest of passing something, rather than nothing at all, while remaining confident that 90 percent of GE resolutions in Vermont to date have passed.



Farmers and activists hold a press conference at the Agriculture Building in Montpelier, October 2003.

After your town's vote . . .

- **Call the ISE Biotechnology Project** at 802-454-7138 or email biotech@social-ecology.org. Please let us know what happened in your town. Did your article pass? Exactly what wording passed? Did your town seem generally supportive of the article? If it was voted down, do you understand why? Do you have thoughts on changing the wording, or the process for next year? What would have helped you in your efforts? What advice would you give others working in your region? Which groups helped you to bring the resolution to vote?
- **Media!** Contact reporters, newspapers, and radio stations and let them know what happened in your town. Ask them to write an article, or offer to write one yourself. Send a letter to the editor and encourage other people to do the same. There are lots of online magazines and newsites that may run a story about your success: neRAGE.org, indymedia.org, commondreams.org, altnet.org, and many more. Don't hesitate to get your story out there—it's important that people throughout our region find out about it.
- **Write to your legislators**, state and federal. Tell them about the resolution that your town passed and urge them to take action. Although the federal and state governments have largely ignored the issue of biotechnology, municipalities passing resolutions are helping to wake them up!
- **Help develop structures for ongoing organizing.** In 2002 and 2003, VT-GEAN held a meeting one week after Town Meeting Day to hear everyone's experiences and discuss plans to expand our effort over the coming year. The meeting was held in an accessible, public location near the center of the state. This was critical for sharing information and getting reports back from all over the region. It also helped us celebrate the amazing success that we had. We are working to help revive this dynamic statewide network!
- **Monitor follow-up and implementation** of your resolution or ordinance. Keep a close watch on any actions taken by city or town officials following your vote. Make sure all steps that were agreed to by voters are actually carried out. If your resolution mandated notifying elected representatives of your town's position, offer to help town officials draft this letter and assemble helpful supporting materials. If there was opposition in your community to the resolution, find out more about it. Continuing to talk with farmers is an important part of on-going work.

Support from farmers

Vermont's conventional dairy farmers are the backbone of our state's agricultural economy. While organic farmers (including the rapidly growing numbers of organic dairies) have been among the most vocal supporters for a moratorium on growing genetically engineered crops, the views of so-called conventional farmers vary widely. The generally pro-agribusiness Vermont Farm Bureau claims to speak for these farmers, and has in most counties taken a firmly pro-GE position. But many disagree. Prior to the 2004 Vermont legislative session, activists with the ISE Biotech Project and Rural Vermont developed the following petition, which was signed by over 120 conventional dairy farmers in Vermont:

We the undersigned conventional dairy farmers of Vermont are committed to cultivating only non-GE (genetically engineered) crops for the following reasons:

1. We recognize that “coexistence” of genetically engineered crops and non-GE crops is not possible because of genetic drift.
2. We respect our neighbors’ right to plant crops without the threat of cross-pollination from GE crops.
3. We want to maintain the pure image that Vermont products have on the market.
4. We are concerned that the cultivation of GE crops will create insects and weeds that have a higher resistance to insecticides and herbicides, which will be more difficult to control in the long run.
5. We are concerned because GE foods have not been proven safe for human consumption.
6. We do not want to further the corporate consolidation of our family farms and food.

Until genetically engineered crops were introduced into Vermont, different types of farmers could farm side by side and not threaten each other’s livelihood. Now, these GE crops threaten our farms and our markets. We believe that taking a time out from GE crops in Vermont would allow time for our policy to catch up with the technology and would support Vermont’s standards for producing high quality, safe food and would ensure a strong, viable market for Vermont products.

We, the undersigned, ask that you protect our state from the contamination and other problems caused by genetically engineered crops. We will not plant these seeds until we are sure that they will not threaten our neighbors or our environment. We are calling on the state legislature and administration to protect our farms, our food, and our families by supporting legislation to mandate the labeling of GE seeds sold in Vermont, to place the burden of liability for GE crops on the corporations who sell the seeds, to protect non-GE farmers from patent infringement suits, and to place a moratorium on the planting of GE crops in Vermont.

Sample Resolutions

Middlesex and Hyde Park, Vermont, March 2004 (and several others in 2003-'05)

Whereas genetically engineered (GE) foods and crops are likely to cause long-term damage to the environment, threaten the integrity of rural, family farm economies, and can have serious impacts on human health; whereas GE crops have been found to contaminate other crops through cross-pollination, and are stringently regulated in more than 30 countries; and whereas citizens throughout Vermont and the United States are taking steps to address concerns about GE foods at the state and local levels because Congress and federal regulatory agencies have failed to adequately address this issue, shall the residents of Middlesex:

1. Call upon our elected officials, including Vermont legislators, Congressional representatives and U.S. senators, to support the mandatory labeling by manufacturers and processors of all

genetically engineered food and seeds, as well as a moratorium on the further growing of GE crops until there is credible and independent scientific evidence that these products are not harmful to our health, the environment, and the survival of family farms, and

2. Declare our support for legislation at the state and federal levels that will shift all liability from farmers to the commercial developers of GE technology [*Alternate language: "that will make the commercial developers of GE technology liable..."*] for any damages resulting from the growing of GE crops, and

3. Declare our opposition to the planting of genetically engineered seeds in the Town, and resolve to actively discourage the planting of GE seeds, as a step toward making Vermont a GE-free planting zone by the 2005 growing season. [*Note: in prior years, several towns used the language, "and declare a moratorium on the planting..."*]

more on next page →



Participants in the Town-to-Town Campaign rally in front of the State House in Montpelier, March 2003.

Thetford, Vermont, March 2004

The Town of Thetford is concerned that unlabeled and unregistered genetically engineered seeds are being sold for use by Vermont farmers. We urge the state regulatory agencies to study the long-range consequences of this to Vermont agriculture, particularly as it affects organic farmers. Cross-pollination of crops has not been sufficiently tested. We support a two year moratorium on the use of genetically engineered crops in Vermont until this is done.

Rutland, Vermont, March 2004

The voters of the City of Rutland call upon the Governor, our State Legislators, and the Regulatory Agencies to require all Genetically Engineered (GE) food and seed be labeled as such. (Passed by a vote of 2140 to 601).

Hartford, Hartland, Royalton, West Windsor, and Sharon, VT, March 2003

Whereas many foods that we eat have been genetically engineered or contain genetically engineered ingredients, and whereas genetically engineered foods are fundamentally different from conventional foods in that they have foreign DNA from bacteria, viruses, animals or plants spliced into their genetic codes, and whereas such foods can have unpredictable effects on human health, and whereas consumers cannot avoid buying such foods since no foods in this country are labeled for genetically engineered content, and whereas the principles of democratic society require being able to make informed choices, therefore the residents of the town of Hartford vote to call upon our legislative and congressional representatives to work toward the mandatory labeling of all genetically engineered food products.

Brooklin, Maine, April 2005

Shall the town vote to voluntarily protect its agriculture and marine economies, environment and private property from irreversible genetically modified organism (GMO) contamination by declaring Brooklin a GMO-free zone?

[Passed by voice vote.]

Cummington, Massachusetts, May 2004

Whereas the people of Cummington are concerned about the long-term health of our environment and of our local farms and farmers; whereas genetically engineered (GE) crops have not been proven safe for the humans or for the ecosystems with which they interact; whereas GE crops have been found to contaminate other crops and local flora through cross-pollination, causing unintended and unknown changes to their biology; whereas GE crops and products containing them are strictly regulated in more than 30 other countries; and whereas citizens throughout the United States are taking steps to address their concerns about GE crops in response to the failure of Congress and federal regulatory agencies to adequately address the issue; the residents of Cummington hereby resolve:

1. To encourage a local moratorium on further growing of genetically engineered crops until there is credible and scientific evidence that these products are not harmful to our health or our environment.
2. Call upon our state and federal governments, including the Massachusetts Legislature, the U.S. Congress, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Food and Drug Administration, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, to support the mandatory labeling of all genetically engineered foods and

seeds and the full assignment of liability to the commercial developers of genetically engineered foods.

3. Agree that the Clerk shall send copies of this article to the elected representatives for this town, including the Massachusetts State Legislators, the Governor, the Commissioner of the Department of Food and Agriculture, and our Congressional Representative John Olver and Senators John Kerry and Edward Kennedy.

Mendocino County, California, March 2003



Section 1. Finding. The people of Mendocino County wish to protect the county's agriculture, environment, economy, and private property from genetic pollution by genetically modified organisms.

Section 2. Prohibition. It shall be unlawful for any person, firm, or corporation to propagate, cultivate, raise, or grow genetically modified organisms in Mendocino County.

Section 3. Definitions.

(a) Genetically modified organisms means specific organisms whose native intrinsic DNA has been intentionally altered or amended with non species specific DNA. For purposes of this ordinance, genetic modification does not include organisms created by traditional breeding or hybridization, or to microorganisms created by moving genes or gene segments between unre-

lated bacteria.

(b) DNA or deoxyribonucleic acid means a complex protein that is present in every cell of an organism and is the 'blueprint' for the organism's development.

(c) Organism means any living thing.

(d) Agricultural Commissioner means the Agricultural Commissioner of Mendocino County.

Section 4. Penalties.

(a) The Agricultural Commissioner shall notify any person, firm, or corporation that may be in violation of Section 2 of this Ordinance, that any organisms in violation of this Ordinance are subject to confiscation and destruction.

(b) Any person, firm, or corporation that receives notification under subparagraph (a) shall have five (5) days to respond to such notification with evidence that such organisms are not in violation of this Ordinance.

(c) Upon receipt of any evidence under paragraph (b), the Agricultural Commissioner shall consider such evidence and any other evidence that is presented or which is relevant to a determination of such violation. The Agricultural Commissioner shall make such determination as soon as possible, but at least before any genetic pollution may occur.

(d) Upon making a determination that a violation of this Ordinance exists, the Agricultural Commissioner shall cause to be confiscated and destroyed any such organisms that are in violation of this Ordinance before any genetic pollution may occur.

(e) If the Agricultural Commissioner determines

there has been a violation of this Ordinance, in addition to confiscation and destruction of any organisms that are found to be in violation, the Agricultural Commissioner shall impose a monetary penalty on the person, firm, or corporation responsible for the violation, taking into account the amount of damage, any potential damage, and the willfulness of the person, firm, or corporation.

San Francisco, California, July, 2000

WHEREAS, consumers of any food product have the right to complete confidence and thorough knowledge of any ingredient in their food or other products; and

WHEREAS, genetically engineered (g.e.) foods have not been adequately tested by any federal agency for long-term impacts on human health or the environment; and

WHEREAS, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) suggests only that companies engineering foods state that g.e. foods are safe, but requires no further testing; and

WHEREAS, competent scientific researchers have suggested that g.e. foods, seed, and other products could pose risks to the environment, including damaged soil ecology, harmful effects to wildlife, increased use of farm chemicals, and other potential effects; and

WHEREAS, scientists and other researchers have indicated that g.e. crops may harm beneficial insect species, such as Monarch butterflies, as well as threatened and endangered insect species; and

WHEREAS, g.e. materials could have serious impacts on levels of toxins in food, antibiotic resistance, cancer, immuno-suppression, and allergic reactions, and may be particularly threatening to children and the elderly; and

WHEREAS, in the event of a serious health impact

and an ensuing lawsuit, the federal government has not yet assigned liability to the commercial developers of g.e. foods; and

WHEREAS, g.e. foods are growing in prevalence in the United States and around the world, without sufficient regulation or research; and

WHEREAS, many community organizations, representing farmers and sustainable agriculture interests, as well as consumers, environmentalists and others, have argued for a moratorium on g.e. foods, and some countries have effectively—if not officially—instituted a moratorium, including France, Italy, Denmark, Greece, and Luxembourg; and

WHEREAS, the European Commission has agreed on terms to guarantee the labeling of g.e. foods; and

WHEREAS, the City of Berkeley's Unified School District's Food Policy, adopted in August of 1999, establishes a goal of serving organic foods to the maximum extent possible in Berkeley's schools; and

WHEREAS, the City of Berkeley's Board of Education and the Berkeley City Council have approved resolutions to urge the federal government to ban the growing, disseminating, and marketing of products that contain g.e. organisms until they have been proven safe for human consumption and for the environment; now, therefore be it

RESOLVED, that the Commission on the Environment hereby requests the Mayor and the Board of Supervisors to write a letter to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) stating that all g.e. foods should be labeled clearly, that all g.e. material should be thoroughly researched and regulated, that liability should be assigned to the commercial developers of g.e. foods, and that, until

these materials are proven safe, that the FDA, the EPA, and the USDA should establish a moratorium on these products; and, be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Commission on the Environment urges the Mayor and the Board of Supervisors to request that all City departments and agencies, including those in City Hall, give preference to certified organic food vendors during any and all contract negotiations; and, be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Commission on the Environment urges the Mayor and the Board of Supervisors to require that, by January of 2001, special events held by City departments and City

agencies, including those in City Hall, give preference to caterers that avoid g.e. ingredients and use certified organic foods; and, be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Commission on the Environment urges the Mayor and the Board of Supervisors to urge the San Francisco Unified School District to serve certified organic lunches; and, be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Commission on the Environment urges the Mayor and the Board of Supervisors to request that the Department of Consumer Assurance provide educational materials about g.e. foods to grocers and where possible to the general public in San Francisco.



San Francisco rally across from the Biotechnology Industry Organization's convention, June 2004. Photo: Indybay.org.

Information & Resources on Genetic Engineering

Books:

Redesigning Life? The Worldwide Challenge to Genetic Engineering, edited by Brian Tokar, London: Zed Books, 2001.

Seeds of Deception: Exposing Industry and Government Lies about the Safety of the Genetically Engineered Foods You're Eating, by Jeffrey M. Smith, Fairfield, Iowa: Yes Books, 2003.

Genetic Engineering, Food and the Environment, by Luke Anderson, White River Jct., VT: Chelsea Green, 1999.

Genetic Engineering: Dreams or Nightmares, by Mae-wan Ho, Continuum Publishing Group, Revised edition, 2000.

Gene Traders: Biotechnology, World Trade and the Globalization of Hunger, edited by Brian Tokar, Burlington, VT: Toward Freedom, 2004.

World Hunger: Twelve Myths, by Frances Moore Lappé, Joseph Collins and Peter Rosset, (Second edition), New York: Grove Press, 1998.

Exploding the Gene Myth, by Ruth Hubbard and Elijah Wald, Boston: Beacon Press, Revised edition, 1997.

Biopiracy, by Vandana Shiva, Boston: South End Press, 1997.

Websites:

GE-Free Maine, gefreemaine.org

GMWatch/UK, gmwatch.org

Center for Food Safety, foodsafetynow.org

Northeast Resistance Against Genetic Engineering, nerage.org

GMO-Free Europe, www.gmofree-europe.org

Institute for Responsible Technology, seedsofdeception.com

Union of Concerned Scientists, ucsusa.org

Organic Consumers Association, organicconsumers.org

Consumers Union, www.consumersunion.org/pub/f/foodgenetically_engineered/index.html

Center for Genetics & Society, genetics-and-society.org

Suggested articles and reports:

(Most are available online)

Charles M. Benbrook, "Genetically Engineered Crops and Pesticide Use in the United States: The First Nine Years," BioTech InfoNet Technical Paper Number 7, October 2004.

Ricarda Steinbrecher, "Ecological Consequences of Genetic Engineering" in *Redesigning Life?* (see book list)

Margaret Mellon and Jane Rissler, "Gone to Seed: Transgenic Contaminants in the Traditional Seed Supply," Union of Concerned Scientists, February 2004.

David R. Moeller, *GMO Liability Threats for Farmers: Legal Issues Surrounding the Planting of Genetically Modified Crops*, Institute for Agriculture & Trade Policy, November, 2001.

William Freese and David Schubert, "Safety Testing and Regulation of Genetically Engineered Foods," *Biotechnology and Genetic Engineering Reviews*, Vol. 21, pp. 299–324, November 2004.

Charles M. Benbrook, "Do GM Crops Mean Less Pesticide Use?," *Pesticide Outlook*, October 2001.

Oligopoly, Inc.: Concentration in Corporate Power, ETC Group Communiqué No. 82, Nov./Dec. 2003.

Brian Tokar, "Monsanto: A Checkered History," *The Ecologist*, Sept./Oct. 1998, revised and reprinted in Jerry Mander and Edward Goldsmith, *The Case Against the Global Economy* (UK edition), London: Earthscan, 2001.

British Medical Association "The Impact of Genetic Modification on Agriculture, Food and Health," May, 1999.

Stanley W.B. Ewen and Arpad Pusztai, "Effect of diets containing genetically modified potatoes expressing *Galanthus nivalis* lectin on rat small intestine," *The Lancet*, Vol. 354, No. 9187, 16 October 1999, pp. 1353-54.