

The Organic Food and Farming Targets Bill Campaign

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PRESS RELEASE

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Organic food: poor relation in Government research budget

Organic farming is set to receive 1.8% of the research budget allocated to agriculture in 2000 while biotechnology and genetic modification will get 23.6%. This equates to £2 million for organic farming, and £26 million for biotechnology research. In addition the Government is spending £4 million of public money on 41 GM trial sites, which are likely to contaminate nearby organic crops. Funding for organic conversion, meanwhile, ran out in November 1999, and no new money is available until April 2001.

While the organic sector is booming, with a market value predicted to be worth £1 billion by 2002 and demand growing at 40% per year, sales of GM crops in Europe have flopped.

The Government's budget decisions are clearly out of step with both the public's demand for GM-free and organic food, and also with its public encouragement of farmers to produce for the market place.

"The organic sector needs all the research funding it can get," says Paul Tyler MP, who is sponsoring the Organic Food and Farming Targets Bill. The Bill is due for its second reading in the Commons on Friday 5th May. "At present the UK imports 70% of our organic produce, so farmers, the environment and consumers in the UK are losing out. There are many barriers to growth of the organic market, including lack of research. The Organic Targets Bill could help by putting a long-term strategy in place, with targets, to ensure that these barriers are overcome. The Prime Minister has committed to a modest expansion target for 2006. Our cross-party group is asking for the Government to put its money where its mouth is and adopt a target of 30%."

The Organic Food and Farming Targets Bill aims to ensure that:

- 30% of agricultural land in England and Wales is organic by 2010;
- 20% of the food that we consume is organic by 2010;
- organic food becomes more affordable to more people.

The Bill brings together an unprecedented alliance of over 200 MPs and 60 organisations including supermarkets, trade unions, consumer groups and environmental pressure groups.

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