



House of Commons
Environment, Food and Rural
Affairs Committee

**Conduct of the GM
Public Debate:
Food Standards
Agency Reply to the
Committee's Report**

Sixth Special Report

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The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and its associated bodies.

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Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Gavin Devine (Clerk), Fiona McLean (Second Clerk), Dr Kate Trumper and Jonathan Little (Committee Specialists), Andy Boyd and Louise Combs (Committee Assistants), Anne Woolhouse (Secretary) and Rebecca Flynn (Intern).

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, House of Commons, 7 Millbank, London SW1P 3JA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 3262; the Committee's e-mail address is: efracom@parliament.uk.

SIXTH SPECIAL REPORT

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee reported to the House on *Conduct of the GM Public Debate* in its Eighteenth Report of Session 2002–03, published on 20 November 2003 as HC 1220. The Food Standards Agency's Reply to the Report was received on 17 January 2004.

Food Standards Agency response

Recommendation

We would value an explanation from the Food Standards Agency of its decision to undertake a 'public debate' of its own about GM food, why it chose to do so at the time that it did, what was the cost to public funds of its initiative, and how its work relates to other strands of the public debate. We would also be keen to learn of future plans for the Agency to study public opinion about GM Food. (paragraph 38)

The Food Standards Agency undertook its 'public debate' activities in line with its independent remit to protect consumer interests in relation to food and its commitment to consumer choice, openness and transparency. These activities were different from the activities taken forward by the *GM Nation?* public debate as the FSA specifically wanted to hear the views of hard to reach groups including young and low-income consumers whose voices are not normally heard. Twenty different groups contributed to the FSA's qualitative and deliberative activities, which included focus groups, a citizen's jury, schools' debate and school video. These activities were viewed by the FSA as complementing those of the Government's GM debate. They also formed part of the on-going programme of consumer attitudes work by the FSA, which play an important role in FSA Board policy making. They cost £112,935.

The work was scheduled to enable the Government to receive the advice of the FSA Board on the outcome of the Agency's debate activities in time for it to be considered alongside the results of the *GM Nation?* public debate. In the event, the latter debate was delayed so that the FSA's advice reached the Government first in July 2003.

The FSA has no specific plans to study public opinion on GM further, but will continue to conduct public opinion polls on food issues, which may include questions on GM.