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Participation and partnership: a critical discourse analysis perspective on the dialectics of regulation and democracy

Extract 1

M1: There are two or three problems or concerns really. One really is the lack of time the parish has been given with respect of when we know. We don't know when the site is to be. We only know when the site is to be drilled. The County Council has put a motion through that we would ask DEFRA to let us know when the site is agreed, and then we could have a meeting like this if you like before it all gets out of hand. The other thing is there's a massive increase in nose problems through spores that are in the air now. Years ago we used to have hay fever problems at hay time, now we seem to get them - Is there any difference between the spores of genetically modified crops and the conventional crop? I think those are two major concerns that locally are causing problems. I don't know whether there's an answer to both but there certainly is an answer in time delay and there may be an answer to the other.

M2: Could I just make a point as well? I mean the first part of that, this year the first we knew about these crops was in the newspaper.

M1: Exactly.

M2: And when we did draw some information off the Internet, it was the day they'd stated for sowing. So that's when the Parish Council knew-

M1: The County Council has asked the Government to - if we can know - when the site is decided upon then we need the information. And I think that will give us a reasonable length of time to evaluate whether it is or isn't going to be a problem.

Government Official: Can I [unclear word]. Well, I think that I said that our practice is to write to all Parish Councils when a trial site is proposed and we did that-

M1: No, that isn't what happened-

Government Official: Could I just say what we do? [Extended account of the notification procedure omitted.] So we do our very best to make sure that the people know.

M1: At what point do you know which site you are going to use?

Extract 2

Andrew Hawthorne My name is Andrew Hawthorne. I am the Conservative Branch Chairman, responsible for this ward, which is why I am here tonight. I have got a fairly simple question, to DEFRA;

<<He begins reading from a typed sheet of paper>>

With food over production, to the point where the CAP is paying for set-aside, what is the purpose, of these possibly dangerous experiments?

We now know the damage that chemical farming has caused over the last 50 years, and rightfully are working at ways to decrease our dependency on chemical companies in our agriculture, which has suffered, and our water, and everything else. These experiments are surely going in the wrong direction, are they not?

<<He then asks a second question. This is followed by applause.>>

DEFRA representative <<slow deliberate speech>> In my opening remarks I said two things that I think were relevant to the first question.

First, the crops themselves are considered to be safe, both by the independent experts on ACRE in this country, and by ALL the experts and regulatory bodies in the whole of the European Union, in the case of maize, which has a marketing consent. That's the crop.

I also talked a little bit about the herbicide, or herbicides, there's more than one at issue here, and I think I said also that those have been looked at by the independent err government advisory body for herbicides, and they are considered to be safe as well. And the herbicides are in fact in use in domestic, domestically you can buy them from your local umm garden centres.

So those two things independently, the crops themselves and the herbicides, have been looked at very carefully, by all the leading experts, and they have been considered to be safe. What is being tested, in the farm scale evaluations, is the COMBINATION of the herbicide with the herbicide-tolerant GM crops, and to look at the effect, if any, on farmland wildlife. It's being done in FIELD size trials. Now the results of that experiment will not be known for err a year or so. But the whole **purpose** of the experiment is to SEE, if there is any concern as a result of these trials. And the trials are limited in nature in terms of the land area of the country and the trials themselves are considered by the various advisory bodies involved in this process and by the scientific steering committee which is overseeing the whole experiment, the trials themselves are considered to be safe for the country as a whole.

I don't think I can build upon that other than to say, this is, the **purpose** of this is to test the environmental safety of the combination of the crops and the herbicide, before any decision is taken as to whether this umm should be allowed to occur on a commercial basis. I think that's probably all I want to say.

Later in the meeting:

DEFRA representative ... Nobody, err from the government, side is trying to pretend that, all this is very easy. There are VERY significant issues at stake here for the whole country ...

Andrew Hawthorne <<from the floor>> My first question was WHY ARE YOU BOTHERING?

Extract 3

Ben Sorton Ben Sorton, <<village>>. I've got a question for <<the representative>> of DEFRA.

All four of the UK's largest supermarket businesses have eliminated GM ingredients from their own-label foods. And I quote from Sainsbury's that this is "due to overwhelming customer concern". All four supermarket businesses are investigating the future implications of GM ingredients for the rest of their food range, but to quote Sainsbury's, "they would like to offer animal derived products from non-GM fed sources. This would represent a major change for industry and discussions are in process to find a solution."

Why continue- So my question is, first question, why continue with GM crop trials when significant consumer feedback shows that the challenge is HOW to satisfy the market without use of GM crops. And <<second question>> what is being done to satisfy the non-GM fed demand.

<<lengthy applause from audience>>

DEFRA Representative I think this is going back to the beginning of the farm scale evaluation programme to answer that question.

What we had in 1998 was a batch of GM crops which came through the European regulatory process. Basically one of them remains. There was a full European Union approval for its marketing, so it could have been grown commercially bar one or two remaining regulatory hurdles. It was at that point that the concerns expressed by the various umm scientific and err NGO bodies up and down the country, that there ought to be certain testing of environmental effects. And, an agreement was reached between the government and the biotechnology farming industry that there should be no commercial production of GM crops whilst the farm scale evaluation programme was in effect. Without that agreement it is highly likely that the GM crops that were coming through the European regulatory system umm could enter err reasonably quickly into commercial production. So what we have at the moment is a pause, before there can be commercialisation.

A decision will have to be taken by the government at the end of this process when the results of the farm scale evaluations are available, then they'll have to take the decision, on whether there should be commercialisation. So I think it's important to bear in mind that the FSEs are allowing time for further research and for, consideration, and I think an element in all of this is err also going to be, what the people of this country want. I think that is obviously highly relevant and we have ways [err we have ways of expressing your views to your representatives.

<<audience shouts including "You already know what people want", "We don't want it" and calls for the proposed 5 year moratorium>>

Man from audience And you 'have ways' of ignoring us.

Woman from audience <<inaudible>> you're not listening.

<<audience laughter in response to these comments>>

Environmental NGO Speaker Err I don't think <<the government representative>> answered the question really.

<<audience laughter and long applause>>

I think the question was why, when nobody wants to buy GM food, are we spending four and a half million pounds of tax payers' money on researching GM crops?

<<audience applause and cheers.>>

Extract 4

F1: My name is [name] and I am a voluntary campaigner based in [name of town] for [name of NGO] and I have devoted much of the last year to campaigning and finding out all about GM crops.

I have a simple question ... I would like umm the two speakers from DEFRA & GM crop & herbicide company tonight, to supply me, by speaking to you all, the names and reference numbers of any independent research to deal with safety, as regards these two crops, maize and oil seed rape.

This is for example: umm, if I was to breathe in the pollen, could they tell me please what tests have been done by independent scientists to say whether that will leave me totally healthy or whether there may be some risk; if a cow was to eat some grass, upon which the pollen had dropped in its short life, coming from these crops. Can we say that these things have BEEN tested, to see the result of that? That sort of thing. Thanks very much.

Audience: [applause]

Industry representative: Umm, yes. I CAN answer that question. The answer, when it comes down to INDEPENDENT research, umm I can't give you an answer to that.

To my knowledge I'm not aware of INDEPENDENT research. I AM aware of a lot of research that has been done both by OUR company and by OTHER companies, which has been looked at INDEPENDENTLY. ALL the results have been looked at INDEPENDENTLY, on a NUMBER of occasions, they umm, both in this country and in other countries around the world. And that is the only reason WHY we are allowed to grow these things in this country. So I may not be able to answer your question in terms of INDEPENDENT RESEARCH, but certainly this information that has been presented has been looked at INDEPENDENTLY, yes.

F1: Have you got the research papers please, so I can read them too? ... Can I go on the internet, and actually READ this information. This is what I want to be able to do.

Industry representative: Okay, if you're talking about maize you can certainly look on OUR Internet or on, come to that DEFRA's Internet, and look at what safety information there. Yes. And there is safety information in there.

Chair: All right, next question please.

[While the chair asks for the next question, members of the audience point out that the question has not been answered by the government representative. They ask for him to answer it. It becomes evident that the Government representative is not going to answer. The chair still asks for the next question. F1 returns to the microphone.]

F1 I have been writing to the Government, at least once a month for seven months, and before that quite frequently. The Department of the Environment, Margaret Beckett, Michael Meacher. Written to in parliament, at one or two addresses that I've had for them. I have NEVER had a reply other than the STANDARD reply, which are just like [the industry representative] kindly said. Years, dossiers full of it. NEVER have they answered my question with ONE research paper number or title. I DO not believe this exists.
[Loud 6 second applause. The chair invites another question.]

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