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By Nina Pullman

Thursday 11th May 2017, 9:46 GMT

Eustice approves GM potato trial

Farming minister George Eustice has approved a four-year trial on GM potatoes at The Sainsbury Laboratory in Norwich



GM potatoes are to undergo field trials

Farming minister George Eustice has approved a four-year trial of genetically modified (GM) potatoes at The Sainsbury Laboratory in Norwich.

The trial site, which is at the John Innes Centre, must meet various restrictions, including maintaining a width of 20 metres around the GM plants, and not exceed 1,000 sq m in size. The trial will look at the effect of various genes on potato late blight resistance.

In a letter of consent at the end of April, released without any promotion, Eustice wrote that he has "taken advice from the advisory committee

on Releases to the Environment and Natural England", and agreed the terms, limitations and conditions of consent with the Food Standards Agency in terms of health and safety to humans.

Anti-GM campaigners have criticised the decision, saying that field trials will be conducted without the usual preceding glasshouse experiments.

A **multi-stakeholder objection** was lodged against the trial signed by 33 organisations including farmers, scientists, retailers, caterers and environmentalists. Concerns included food safety, risk of contamination and the fact the potatoes "will be of no net benefit to society".

Director of campaign GM Freeze Liz O'Neill said: "We are deeply concerned that Defra has signed a regulatory blank cheque in consenting to the planting of experimental potatoes which have not even been analysed in a test tube, much less properly studied under controlled greenhouse conditions."

Westminster has previously stood in favour of GM and "science-led" decisions, while the governments of Scotland and Wales have banned any cultivation of GM foods.