

2. Oral Questions

2.1 Deputy G.C.L. Baudains of St. Clement of the Minister for Planning and Environment regarding the outcome of the genetically modified Jersey Royal potato experiment:

Would the Minister update Members on the genetically modified Jersey Royal potato experiment?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel of St. Saviour (The Minister for Planning and Environment):

The States in 1999 on a proposition brought by Deputy Crowcroft, P.33/99, adopted by a vote of 42 to 5 the proposition which was that the Island authorities “take all possible steps to designate and maintain the Island of Jersey free from the growing of genetically modified organisms.” Following that debate, the then Agricultural and Fisheries Committee suspended a programme of research into a new strain of the Jersey Royal potato, which could have been resistant to the potato cyst nematode worm, to reduce the reliance on chemical pesticides. Since that time, there are no genetically modified Jersey Royal potato experiments currently being undertaken by the Department of the Environment or the States, to my knowledge. Further, I am given to understand that no other organisation is carrying out any experiment of this type locally.

2.1.1 Deputy G.C.L. Baudains:

I understand from my previous attendance in this Assembly that the laboratory work was, in fact, ceased. I think that was due to Deputy Dorey, if I remember correctly. I am not quite sure but a few years ago some farmers were paid by the Agricultural Department a sum of money, I think it was £100 a vergée, if I recall correctly, to grow a special variety of Jersey Royal. Could the Minister confirm that it was, in fact, the genetically modified variety and if so, could he state what has happened to the many tons of potatoes that were so grown?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

I will have to look into that but I am advised that following the decision by the Agriculture and Fisheries Committee that all material used in the trials was autoclaved and incinerated. Certainly I would have thought that following the decision by this House to designate and maintain the Island free from the growing of any genetically modified organisms, that were any of those potatoes that the Deputy refers to genetically modified, then those farmers would have been breaking the spirit of the agreement passed by this House. I will look into it and see whether or not any of those potatoes still exist but from my preliminary investigations, I am told that all of them were destroyed.