



**Field Work:  
Weighing up the Costs  
and Benefits of GM crops**





## ***A roller-coaster ride ...***

“... worse than useless” ...

“ ... deep concerns ...”

“... warmly welcomed ...”

“ ... careful economic analysis ...”

“... clear direction ...”





# ***“FIELD WORK”***

- Reflections on the Strategy Unit study on the costs and benefits of GM Crops
- Presentation to the Foundation for Science and Technology
  - Ian Coates, Project Team Leader
    - Tuesday 28th October 2003



# *The role of the Strategy Unit*

- Provides a clear focus for strategic thinking and policy analysis at the heart of Government
  - long-term strategic reviews
  - studies of cross-cutting policy issues
  - strategic audit, (e.g. where does Government stand in relation to its main objectives?)
  - working with departments to promote strategic thinking and improve policy making
- Now linked directly to No 10 Policy Directorate

# *Outline of presentation*

- Where the report fits in
  - Aims and objectives of the SU study
- What the report says
  - Main messages and conclusions
- How the report came together
  - Some reflections on process
- Concluding thoughts
  - Next steps
  - Issues for discussion

***Where the report fits in***





# *Aims & objectives of the SU study*

- A comprehensive and balanced analysis of costs and benefits of commercial cultivation (or not) in the UK the next 10-15 years
  - A mixture of quantitative and qualitative analysis ...
  - ... covering a range of scenarios ...
  - ...looking at GM crops and other approaches that may be used alongside or instead of GM
- A contribution to Government decision-making

# *Some myths exposed*

- The report did NOT:
  - put monetary values on everything - instead, it used quantification only where appropriate
  - substitute for case-by-case assessments - instead, it should be seen as a complement
  - seek to pre-empt the outcome of “GM Nation?” - instead, it sits alongside the public debate
  - set Government policy nor make specific policy recommendations - instead, it is informing policy decisions



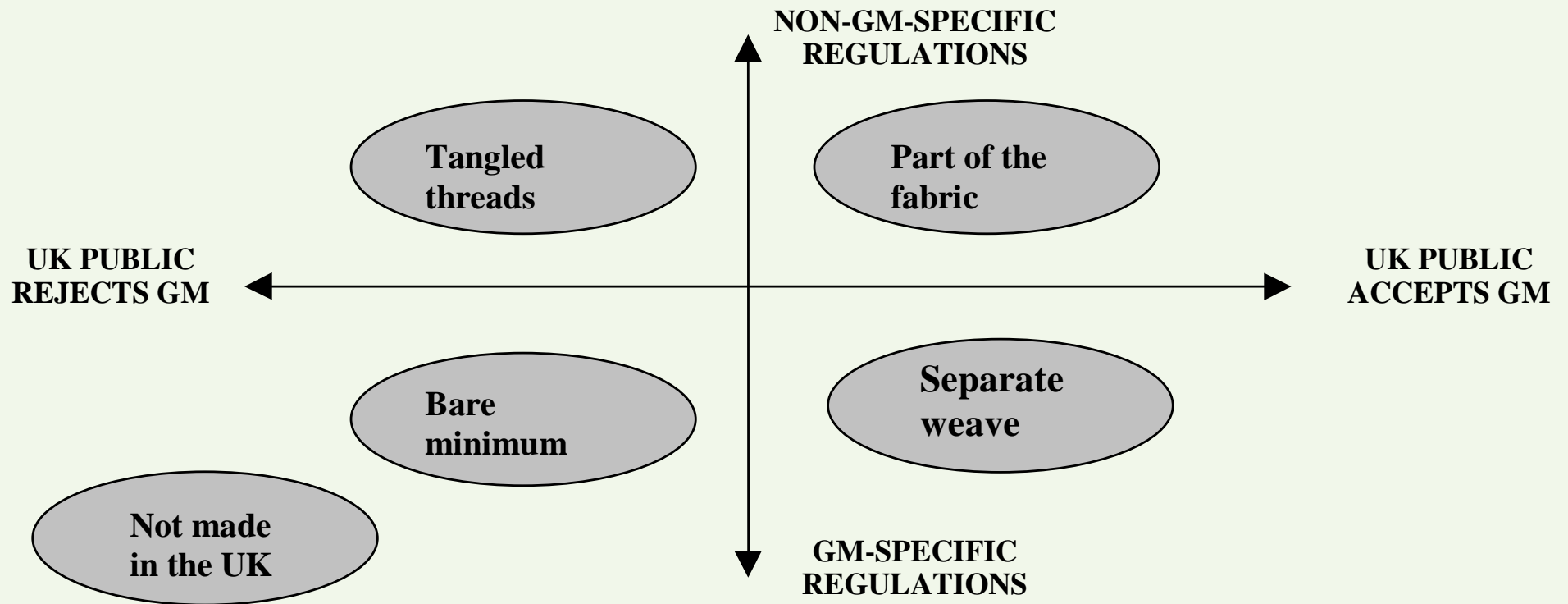
# ***What the report says***



# *Establishing the context*

- GM crops are not an end in themselves
- Instead, they are one possible tool to be used in seeking to achieve a range of policy objectives
  - Agricultural policy
  - Rural policy
  - Environmental policy
  - Science policy
  - Food safety policy
  - Development policy
- These policy objectives are ultimately determined by society's preferences

# Scenario approach

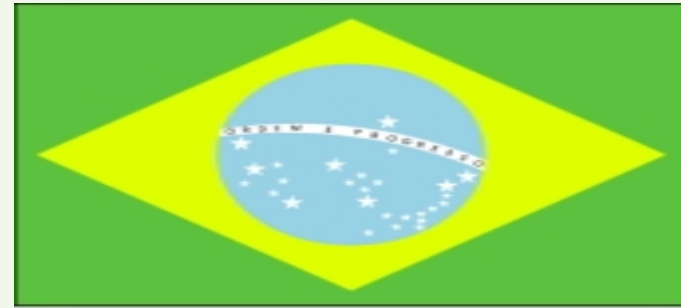


# *Shocks and surprises*

Health



Political / economic



Environment



Innovation



## *Main conclusions (1)*

- Existing GM crops could offer some cost and convenience advantages to UK farmers
- But any economic benefit to the UK is likely to be limited (in the short-term)
- This is because only a narrow range of existing GM crops are currently suited to UK conditions, and . . .
- ... weak consumer demand (+ current retailer policy) is likely to limit take-up



## *Main conclusions (2)*

- Longer term - trade-offs in every scenario
- Future developments in GM crops *may* have the *potential* to offer wider-ranging benefits
- But the overall balance of future costs and benefits will depend on:
  - public attitudes
  - ability of the regulatory system to manage uncertainties
  - what GM technology can actually deliver



## *Main conclusions (3)*


- Changes in farm management could have positive or negative environmental impacts - depending on incentives
- GM crop R&D in decline in the UK - but significant costs to losing it altogether
- Decisions about GM crops in the UK will have an indirect influence on:
  - wider science-based industries
  - the international community (including developing countries)

# *How the report came together*





# *A learning process*


- A wide range of diverse interest groups ...
  - ... debating across a wide range of issues ...
  - ... in a context in which Government is not trusted, and is perceived to have its own agenda
- 

# ***We made some mistakes!***

- Insufficient range of perspectives reflected in Scoping Note
- Early reliance on indirect consultation, rather than direct stakeholder involvement
- Initial failure to recognise that our own work would itself influence perceptions and trust of Government motives
- Some key stakeholders not consulted until late in the project




## ***But we did some things right!***

- Objective approach - willingness to listen to all sides of the debate
  - No pre-conceived ideas - and no imposition of ideas from officials and Ministers
  - Willingness to be flexible in our approach
  - Ever-increasing involvement of stakeholders, through Expert Groups, seminars, workshops, etc
  - Open publication of work-in-progress
- 





## *And there are lessons for the future*

- Multi-stranded dialogues are complex
    - Forward planning and coherent project-management are required
  - The GM Crops universe is a crowded one
    - Ripple effects need to be understood and taken into account
  - Categorisations are helpful
    - But they are often not how people think
  - Trust no-one!
    - All opinions need to be treated with caution
- 



# *Concluding thoughts*



# *What happens next?*

- Government - with Defra in the lead - is taking the SU report into account in its policy decisions
- The deadline for responses to the report has now passed
  - All responses will be published and passed on to Defra
  - We will also publish a summary of the issues raised

# *Issues to discuss*

- What constitutes a “GM crops policy”?
  - The role of generic policy-making in a framework dominated by case-by-case assessments
- Can the market be trusted to decide about GM crops?
  - Consumer power versus the might of the multi-nationals
- What is the verdict on GM crops technology?
  - Heading to the top of the class, or struggling to make further progress?
- What is the point of agricultural research in the UK?
  - And how does it fit with the future of agriculture?



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