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GMO (In)Digest

Issue 11 of the GMO Campaign Newsletter

EU Work:

Pioneer wins court case against the Commission

Following a legal complaint from Pioneer, the European Court of Justice declared on 26th September, that the European Commission had failed to fulfil its obligations under Article 18 of Directive 2001/18/EC by failing to submit to the Council a proposal relating to the authorisation for cultivation of Pioneer's GMO maize 1507 after no decision was reached at the 25th February 2009 Regulatory Committee. In other words, the EU Commission has been too slow to propose allowing the cultivation of a poorly assessed potentially dangerous GMO that EU citizens reject massively. Indeed, the story of 1507 is an old one, as Pioneer had first lodged an application for its GMO maize in 2001. This maize produces a Bt insecticide toxin that may represent a threat to EU butterflies species, and EFSA itself has recognised that it cannot assess its impacts on bees and other pollinators. It is also tolerant to a toxic herbicide, glufosinate ammonium, but this trait has not even been assessed because the herbicide is supposedly prohibited to be used on maize! And the company refused to make the modifications to its notification that the Commission had asked following EFSA's recommendations for risk management. But despite all these failures and faced with increasing political and citizen opposition to growing GMOs in European fields, GMO companies use the tribunal to impose their products. The Court decision shows that the improvements to the risk assessment and authorisation process that the environment council from

December 2008 had unanimously asked for have yet to be implemented in the EU law in order to avoid that poorly tested unwanted products can be authorised.

Black week for a GMO-free Europe: 3 devastating decisions on GMOs

On 6th November, the EU Commission made 3 devastating decisions on GMOs: Arguing from the court decision (see above), the Commission decided to propose to the Council to authorise the cultivation of Pioneer's GMO maize 1507, which would be the first GMO maize to be approved for cultivation in 15 years. The Greens/EFA group considers that it is a biased interpretation of the Court decision, as it states that the Commission should have presented a proposal to the Council in a timely fashion, but it does not say that the proposal must be the same as the one in the Standing Committee and cannot be changed. In view of the poor assessment of this GM maize and the refusal of the company to supply EFSA with supplementary information that the agency requested, the Commission would have been justified to propose to reject granting the authorisation. It is now up to the Environment Ministers to decide on the cultivation of this maize at their next Council on 13th December, where a qualified majority is needed to reject the Commission proposal. Green MEP José Bové declared: *"The environment ministers who will be in charge of the authorisation must obviously reject it. They must show that in contrast to the US, they consider that citizens' health and nature protection are more important than the short-term economic gains of the agrochemical industry."* The Greens will actively support national campaigns to push all EU governments to vote against this authorisation. In announcing this decision, Commissioner Borg seems to use the "carrot and stick" approach as he suggested that the same Environment Council re-examines the so-called subsidiarity proposal that would give a pseudo way out for Member States if 1507 maize is allowed. But clearly, this GM maize is the exact counter-example to the proposal. It has been so poorly assessed that it is at the EU level that it should be prohibited, and not authorised with easier national bans. Green MEP Bart Staes strongly said: "*The partial renationalisation of competences on GM cultivation must not be a trick to allow the Commission to force through swifter and easier EU level authorisations. This would be at total odds with public will. Any new approval procedure should not be a tool for the Commission to bully EU member states into accepting authorisations for GM crops for which legitimate concerns clearly exist."* http://gmo.greens-efa.eu/gmo-authorisations-10871.html Interestingly, the decision has not been reached by a consensus with the College of Commissioners. For the 1st time in this legislature, a vote has been called for, and 5 Commissioners (Barnier, Damanaki, Hahn, Lewandowski and Reding) opposed the proposal. The Commission also raised the concerns on GMOs a level as it authorised the marketing of the infamous Smartstax and Powercore GMO maize and 8 other stacked genes GMO varieties. Smartstax carries 6 different insecticide genes and 2 herbicide tolerant genes, making it a toxic cocktail of insecticides and herbicides that will end up on our plates. The combined effects of all these toxins have not been assessed at all. The decision was taken despite thousands of protest mails being sent to the Commission. German NGO Testbiotech and experts from EU Member States have previously pointed out many flaws in the risk assessment performed by Monsanto, DowAgroSciences and the European Food Safety Authority, (EFSA). Testbiotech will now file an official complaint against the Commission decision. Finally, it approved pollen from MON810 GMO maize. More than 10 years after it has been allowed for growing, the EU Commission seems to suddenly realise that this GMO maize may contaminate honey. This decision is the first step towards legalising GMO contamination of honey without informing consumers. Indeed, the Commission is simultaneously proposing to change the honey directive in order to make sure any GMO contamination of honey will be unknown to consumers. The Commission could not have made it worse to demonstrate that it is ready to favour biotech companies, mainly from the US, against protecting the environment and health of EU consumers. All these GMOs that it proposes to authorise have specific problems and have been very poorly assessed and are testimonies of the failures of the authorisation process. There is no doubt that EU citizens will feel betrayed by these EU institutions that should protect them and consider their constant rejection of these products for more than 20 years.

Honey

See (GMO (In)digest 10) The AGRI Committee's opinion report on the Commission proposal to change

the honey directive has been voted on 5th November. The Greens/EFA group's amendments have been rejected and the report follows the Commission proposal despite its dire consequences for beekeepers and honey producers that want to be able to produce honey that is free of genetic contamination and consumers of honey as a natural and healthy product. The Greens/EFA group was alone against all groups in trying to introduce amendments that would have prevented the Commission from circumventing the decision of the European Court of Justice. The group will put its efforts in pushing its amendments in the ENVI Committee, which is the lead committee on the issue. The ENVI report will be voted on 27th November.

Questions for written answer to the Commission

Green MEP Sandrine Bélier asked the Commission two questions linked to the health assessment of GMO maize MON810. 1. Toxicologist Jean-Michel Wal, one EFSA expert, has contradicted Monsanto's data on the digestibility of the Cry1AB protein that is produced by GMO maize MON810 and explained that the protein is not destroyed in simulated gastric liquid close to the physiology of digestion. Despite this contradiction, EFSA has validated this result as part of the arguments in favour of the safety of MON810. This questions the reliability of the assessment of MON810 and other GMO crops. · How does the Commission explain that EFSA validates a result that is rejected by one of its experts? · Does the Commission think that a test perfomed in non-physiological conditions and that is considered irrelevant by one of its experts can be taken into account in the health assessment? 2. French NGO Inf'OGM has shown serious flaws in the compositional analyses data in the MON810 renewal of the authorisation assessment. Indeed, comparisons of the mean values for MON810 with literature range and reported range are mentioned only when results fit Monsanto and not mentioned when the mean values are outside literature or reported range. This questions seriously the reliability of Monsanto's results and the method of MON810 and other GMO crops health assessment. · Can the Commission confirm Inf'OGM's observations? · Can the Commission confirm whether such practices of data manipulation are scientifically correct? The NGO also questions the validity of literature and historical references coming from crops that have been grown in very different conditions that the ones used for the comparison experiment. · Does the Commission consider that these literature and historic comparators are relevant? Inf'OGM also notes that the average histidin value is higher than literature range and lower than historic range. · Can the Commission give a biological explanation of this result?

Conference: A pollinator-friendly agricultural model: the way forward

On 6th November, the Greens/EFA group has organised a public conference on the way forward towards an agricultural model that is good for pollinators. This event aimed at raising awareness of the link between the existing dangers to pollinators and the current agricultural model. Although GMOs were not specifically the topic of the conference, Green MEP Martin Haüsling was able to inform the audience about the 3 devastating decisions the Commission had taken the same day and their potential consequences, including for bees and beekeepers, during its introduction and he emphasised that the Greens/EFA group has been constantly fighting for a GMO-free Europe. The program, presentations from the speakers and recording of the conference are available at http://gmo.greens-efa.eu/a-pollinator-friendly-agricultural-model-10398.html.

Member State/EU news:

Belgium

Citizens show their rejection of GMOs in cradle of biotech industry

While on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the first successful introduction of foreign genes into plants, the Flanders life sciences research institute VIB was organising a symposium to celebrate the achievements of agrobiotechnology, with some of its heroes, recent winners of the World Food Prize http://gmo.greens-efa.eu/monsanto-en-europe-10318.html, on 12th November, Belgium citizens showed their opposition to GMOs at their door in a successful protest that was attended by a few hundred people. This is quite important, as Flanders, and Ghent, is the home of biotech famous pioneers such as Marc Van

Montagu and of a host of research centres and companies that thrived on the development of biotechnology. Today, the region is totally tied up to the GMO industry and the scientific and political establishments are the industry's best spokespersons. This is in sharp contrast with a scientific statement now signed by more than 280 scientists that show that despite all the insurance and propaganda from the industry and its political and scientific allies, there is no scientific consensus on the safety of GMOs. The Greens from the city of Ghent as well as the EP supported the event, and Green MEP Bart Staes and ALDE MEP Corinne Lepage attended the protest.

Luxembourg

Luxembourg committed to more « GMO-free »

A press release from the Ministry of Agriculture, viniculture and rural development concluded to a positive balance of the « GMO-free » policy of the Luxembourg government during the last years. In order to protect biodiversity, farming and consumers' health from the negative impacts of GMOs, Luxembourg is firmly committed to the application of the Precautionary Principle to GMOs. The only 2 GMOs that are allowed for cultivation in the EU (MON810 maize and Amflora potato) are banned in Luxembourg. The government has finalised a regulation for the creation of an official "GMO-free fed" for animal products, such as milk, meat and eggs, as exists in Germany, France and Austria. The first "GMO-free fed" labelled products from conventional agriculture are already on sale in Luxembourg. The Greens/EFA group compliments Luxemburg for this initiative and wishes other EU countries follow suit.

Around the world

Brazil

Critical balance of 10 years of GMOs

The Brazilian NGO Terra de Direitos organised an international seminar to critically assess 10 years of GMOs in Brazil. Speakers from the US, Asia, South America and the EU shared their experiences on the GMO fight with Brazilian NGOs, who presented also the negative impacts of GMO soybean, maize and cotton growing in the country. The Greens/EFA group was represented and explained 15 years of EU resistance to GMOs. The meeting was very important in re-activating NGOs, and particularly the ones who work on preserving biodiversity and local seeds, to use new publicised government initiatives on organic farming and seed conservation to ask for protection from genetic contamination, by for example setting GMO free regions for local, and organic seed production. A political statement has been drafted at the end of the meeting, which highlights the problems in GMO authorisations and asks for GMO and pesticides free regions.

Mexico

Mexico suspends GMO maize releases

On 10th October, the federal judge of the 12th Federal District Court for Civil Matters of Mexico City ordered Mexico's Secretary of Agriculture (SAGARPA, Secretaría de Agricultura, Ganadería, Desarrollo Rural, Pesca, y Alimentación), and its Secretary of Environment (SEMARNAT, Secretaría de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales), to immediately "suspend all activities involving the planting of transgenic corn in the country and end the granting of permission for experimental and pilot commercial plantings" because of imminent harm to the environment. This decision follows a lawsuit that was brought on 5th July last by a collective (accion collectiva) of concerned citizens, producers' organisations, indigenous groups, beekeepers and ecologists. Multinationals like Monsanto and Pioneer are banned from the release of transgenic maize in the Mexican countryside as long as the collective action lawsuits are working their way through the judicial system. Mexico is the centre of origin and diversity of maize with 59 races and thousands of varieties and as such it holds a special responsibility to avoid contamination of local maize varieties by transgenic varieties. The only way to prevent maize ancestors and local adapted varieties to be irremediably contaminated is to stop the growing of GMO maize and we welcome this important

precautionary legal decision from Mexico. http://www.lacoperacha.org.mx/juez-suspende-maiz-transgenico.php

Recommended

Press release

Stodtmeister (CC BY 3.0)

Miteni trial: PFAS must be banned in the EU

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Opinion

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05.06.2025

Responsible MEPs

José Bové

Member

Bart Staes

Member

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