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GMO cultivation

Not here, not anywhere

In the coming weeks, the European Commission will submit to the Standing Committee on plants, animals, food and feed three draft regulations aimed at the renewal of the authorisation for cultivation in the EU of three GM maize varieties[1].

The Standing Committee, composed of experts from Member states, can validate or block the EU Commission's proposal if they reach a qualified majority during the vote. Discussions in this Committee a few years ago concerning maize TC1507 and the risks this GM plant presents to the environment (and especially bees) were extremely controversial, leading the Commission to withdraw its draft authorisation.

But last year, the situation changed, as the so-called "opt-out" regulation entered into force. It allows individual Member states to ban the cultivation of a GM plant on its territory even if it is approved at the EU level. 17 Member States have used the first "phase" of this new procedure to ban GM maize from their soil, citing risks to the environment, the local economy, or organic farming.

Commenting on the decision facing these Member States, Green MEP Bart Staes says: "The Commission's logic is that Member States who have banned GMOs on their territory would not oppose an authorisation at the EU level, but this is completely illogical! Why should Member States take such a hypocritical approach? If you believe GMOs should not be grown, then you should make sure they are not grown across the whole EU, it's as simple as that. Environmental problems will not stop at the borders!"

Indeed, pollution of air and waters by the pesticides used with these GM plants will impact neighbouring countries. Just as worrying is the appearance in Spain of a maize-related weed, teosinte, which is breeding with GM maize Mon 810. This could lead to the creation of highly resistant weeds containing Mon 810's GM trait. EFSA's assessment that this would not be a problem, as the spreading of teosinte would be prevented by the Spanish authorities, is at best wishful thinking. The way it has already spread in the last seven years is appalling. Teosinte has also been recently sighted in the south of France, and there is no reason to expect this spread to stop.

"If we don't want GM plants to pollute our environment, it is obvious we should not accept them polluting our EU neighbours or African[2] and South American countries either, just so that we can feed our own farm animals at a better price with GM maize." says Bart Staes

The European Parliament has already made its view clear, supporting objections[3] to these three

authorization proposals back at the beginning of October. The responsibility is now in the hands of the Member States to do likewise.

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[1] The three varieties are: Monsanto's maize Mon810 (resistant to the corn borer); Syngenta's maize BT11 (producing the Bacillus thuringensis toxin against the corn borer and resistant to a group of herbicides); and Dupont's maize TC1507 (resistant to the corn borer and to a group of herbicides). All three are used to produce animal feed.

[2] The European Parliament voted in June 2016 a report denouncing, among other problems, the use of the private/Public partnership "New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition" to push GM plants in Africa against the local governments' will.

[3] Opposition to the placing on the market of genetically modified maize BT11 seeds, of genetically modified maize 1507 seeds, and of genetically modified maize Mon810 seeds

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