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GMO (In)Digest

Issue 6 of the GMO Campaign Newsletter

EU Work:

7th GMO-free regions conference

In less than a week, on 4th and 5th of September, there will be the 7th GMO-free regions conference in Brussels. Today is your last chance to register, so follow the links below. This conference will be a unique opportunity for GMO activists and concerned citizens to exchange and strategize on how to achieve a GMO-free Europe. An internal meeting of civil society representatives will be held on September 4th in the venue Mundo-B, with various workshops on GMO issues, such as Patent
s on life, GMO contamination of Seed and Upcoming seed legislation, EFSA, risk assessment and conflicts of interest, new GMO technologies and many others. It will be followed by a public conference on September 5th in the European Parliament, on the invitation of the Greens/EFA Group. Central topics of the conference this year will be the deficient risk assessment of GMOs by EFSA, the right to national bans of GMO cultivation, the upcoming seed legislation and the imports of GM soy in connection with next European CAP reform.

- See conference programme
- Register here

No new GMO allowed this summer

(See GMO In(digest) 5)

The GMO-free regions conference will be greeted by great news as we are coming back from vacation. No new GMO has been allowed for growing in the EU this summer. There was a lot of concern that the Commission would go ahead with pending authorizations for growing for six new GMOs in the EU and propose them at the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health (SCFCAH) in July.

Commissioner Dalli had indeed threatened Member States that he would resume authorising new GMOs for commercial growing if no agreement on his "renationalisation" proposal was reached. The Greens/EFA group had written to him to urge him not to proceed with new authorisations.

In his answer from July 27th, Commissioner Dalli recognizes that the Commission is still in the process of implementing the 2008 Environment Council conclusions to strengthen the risk assessment process, and that EFSA indeed has had some problems with ILSI's influence, but that these are no reasons to stop discussions on the "national bans" proposal from the Commission or new authorizations for GMOs. It shows that he may proceed soon with new proposals for authorzing GMOs. However, in July, the Commission has returned the dossiers for three maize lines to EFSA for a new opinion, showing that all doubts on the risks of these GMOs have not been cleared even though these 3 maize lines (MON810, Bt11 and 1507) have all been considered safe by EFSA numerous times.

http://www.testbiotech.org/en/node/685

EFSA new scientific panels

(See GMO In(digest) 4)

On June 18th, EFSA published the names and accompanying Declarations of Interest of the 167 scientists who will start working with the Authority on its Scientific Committee and eight of its Panels, including the GMO panel, from 1 July 2012 onwards for a three year term.

- http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/panels/docs/listpanelmembers1215.pdf
- http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/gmo/gmomembers.htm

It will take some time to scrutinize the names and DOI for 167 scientists, but a first assessment by CEO and Testbiotech, 2 NGOs that follow EFSA's work, shows that although some progress has been made, there are still a lot of concerns about some of the panels, including the GMO one. Conflicts of interest and influence of industry lobby group International Life Sciences Institute ILSI on the panels have apparently not been stopped. According to Testbiotech, the GMO panel is still biased with a majority of its scientists known as proponents of GMOs. Also CEO and EOS have written a letter to EFSA about the two panels (on food Additives and Nutrient Sources in food (ANS) and CEF) that had been renewed in 2011, and for which it should be expected that the new rules on conflicts of interest also apply. According to CEO and Réseau Environnement Santé (RES), two of the five newly appointed experts on the ANS panel, Riccardo Crebelli and Ursula Gundert-Remy, failed to disclose consulting activities for ILSI, in violation of EFSA rules. Mr Franz, member of the EFSA Food Packaging Panel (CEF), evaluating controversial substances used in packaging, such as Bisphenol A, is also a member of the scientific committee of ILSI's 5th Symposium on Food Packaging, scheduled for November 2012 in Berlin. Thus far, Mr Franz has not updated his DoIs, and he is still part of the scientific committee of the ILSI symposium.

The continuing influence of industry on EFSA will have to be an open issue when MEPs will be discussing whether to grant EFSA's discharge in October, after it has been postponed for these same reasons on May 10th.

MS/EU news:

Belgium

Experimental field trial of the GMO potato declared illegal

(See GMO In(digest) 5)

While the second session of the trial of the activists that neutralized an experimental field trial of a GMO potato on May 29th, 2011, is planned in Termonde on January 15th, 2013, the tribunal of Ghent has recognized that the experimental field trial was in fact illegal. Following a complaint by Greenpeace that intended to demonstrate the failures of the GMO authorization process in Belgium, the 1st instance tribunal of Ghent has concluded on August 2nd that the ministerial arrêté that allowed the field trial was insufficiently motivated, and consequently illegal. However, the tribunal has judged that it was not necessary to stop the field trial, as the negative impacts on the environment were not obvious. It is really an absurd judgement that goes against the notion of precautionary principle: the field trial is illegal, but allowed to proceed. The failures of the Belgian GMO authorization process are not only about the potato field trial. For example, in spring 2012, a GMO maize field trial has also been allowed by the Belgian authorities, even though the Council of Biosafety had pointed that this experimental field trial had no scientific interest.

If you want to support the activists that will be judged for the potato field decontamination, see here. You can also get la Faucheuse, their solidarity beer!

France

New label for GMO-free products from July 1st

Following the French decree on labelling of food products signed last January 30th, products that do not contain GMOs may be labelled as "sans OGM" (without GMOs) from July 1st, 2012. This is a strong step forward for suppliers that wish to value their GMO-free production and for consumers who want to be able to choose GMO-free products. Up to now, the EU regulation (from 2004) imposed to label products that contain GMOs, and did not address animal products, for which the biggest amount of GMOs are imported and used. This was a major hurdle for those producers who want to favour a GMO-free production.

The new decree allows producers of animal products who wish to feed their animals without GMOs to inform the consumers about their efforts.

The decree sets up different criteria according to the nature of the ingredients that are part of the food products:

- Ingredients from plant origin (such as maize starch or soy lecithin) can be labelled as "sans OGM", if they are from raw materials that contain less than 0.1 % GMOs.
- The label on animal products (such as milk, meat or eggs) will indicate "fed without GMOs (0.1 %)" or "fed without GMOs (0.9 %)", depending on the source of the animal feed. This is due to the fact that most imported soybean is either labelled as GMO (contains more than 0.9% GMOs) or not labelled, that means only that there is less than 0.9% GMOs. Today, the French food industry is still too dependant on soybean imports to be able to insure sufficient supplies of "GMO-free soybean" (meaning soybean with less than 0.1 % GMOs) for their animal feed.

- Ingredients from bee production (honey, pollen) can be labelled as "GMO free in a 3 km radius".

These statements will appear mostly in the list of ingredients, or in the visual field of the packaging if the GMO-free ingredient represents more than 95% of the product.

After Austria and Germany, France has decided to allow food producers that do not use GMOs to let it be known to the consumers. It remains now to be seen how compatible the GMO-free labelling regulations are in the different EU countries that have such a regulation or are preparing one. Most food companies would like to have a unified EU GMO-free labelling scheme, but we need to be careful to insure the Commission does not decide to propose impractical labelling schemes that would have the consequence that no food producer would label their products.

Around the world:

Turkey

Turkish Food Association withdraws application to import GMO food products

Following the campaign "Yemezler" ("We do not buy it") launched by Greenpeace Mediterranean, the Federation of Food and Drink Industry Associations of Turkey (TGDF) announced that it has withdrawn an application to import 29 different kinds of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) for food production. The application was set to reach completion on Aug. 22.

"The TGDF calls the Biosecurity Council to live up to its mission to immediately put an end to the confusion and anxiety of the public regarding GMOs, demands that [the authorities] take steps to resolve problems emanating from inevitable contamination and withdraws the application in question".

This is very significant for Turkey, as more than 2000 food companies are affiliated to TGDF but Greenpeace Mediterranean Agriculture campaign Tarık Nejat Dinç said that the struggle was not over yet, as an application by the Ünak Gıda Company for three kinds of soy beans was still standing. "If they withdraw this application, the issue of GMOs for food [production] will no longer remain on the agenda," he added. Only a few days later, on August 21st, Unak Gida's application for GMO soy has also been dropped. It is now up to Food, Agriculture and Livestock Minister Mehdi Eker, who had announced his opposition to GMOs, to create a GMO-freeTurkey. 326,000 people had participated in the Greenpeace initiative, demonstrating the sensitivity of the Turkish public to the GMO issue.

http://www.bianet.org/english/agriculture/140345-food-association-withdraws-application-to-import-gm-foods

Paraguay

Monsanto to benefit from illegitimate impeachment of President Lugo

The sky is getting clearer for Monsanto in Paraguay since Center-left Pdt Lugo has seen his impeachment

proposed, analyzed and voted by the Senate after farmers' protests have led to 17 dead, among which 6 policemen and peasants. This civil “coup d'état” has been condemned all over (see Greens/EFA reaction), but is a blessing for Monsanto, who has even been suspected. Despite illegal authorization of Bt cotton from Agriculture minister in October 2011, the national service for plant and seed quality and health (Senave) did not register the variety in the authorized cultivars because Health Ministry and Environment Secretariat had not issued their technical opinion, as required by Paraguayan law. The GMO cotton was prohibited. But this is the past now for Monsanto. The new government has quickly named Jaime Ayala, the president of an agrochemical company, to head SENAVE. Without waiting for the opinion of Health and Environment, Ayala immediately included Bollgard in the national registry of commercial plant varieties (RNCC). And we can be sure he'll show the same enthusiasm to authorize quickly a new variety of GMO cotton, with stacked genes for insect protection (Bt) and herbicide tolerance gene (RR) that Monsanto is submitting for authorization.

http://www.ipsnews.net/2012/07/paraguay-opens-doors-to-unregulated-foreign-investment/

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