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GMO (In)Digest

Issue 5 of the GMO Campaign Newsletter

EU Work:

EFSA discharge

(See GMO In(digest) 4)

On May 10th, the European Parliament voted not to grant EFSA discharge for 2010, but to postpone their decision until October. The Greens/EFA group has been in favour of postponing the granting of EFSA discharge, because of the recurring conflicts of interest involving its management board and scientific panels. As a shining example, the chairman of the board, Ms Banati, resigned from EFSA the day before the vote to take an executive position at industry lobby group *International Life Sciences Institute* ILSI Europe. In 2010, the Greens/EFA group had first drawn attention to the conflict of interest with her dual roles with EFSA and ILSI. The "revolving doors" habit seems to be still common at EFSA, which needs a real cleaning! http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/press/news/120509.htm

The postponement of the discharge provides a good opportunity for EFSA to restore its scientific credibility if serious measures are taken to severe its ties with the industry. A first and tiny step in the right direction has been the rejection of the nomination to EFSA's management board of Mella Frewen, lobby chief at food industry lobby group *FoodDrinkEurope* by the EU Member States.

National bans proposal

(See GMO In(digest) 4)

Despite the Danish Presidency's efforts to sway some countries towards its compromise proposal allowing more freedom for Member States to prevent the growing on their territory of a GMO crop that is allowed at the EU level (see our blog post), there is still a blocking minority against the proposal. France, UK, Germany and Belgium had indicated in a previous meeting (June 7th) that they were not ready to move, pushing Denmark to take the vote on the proposal out of the agenda of last Environment Council (June 11th) and to acknowledge that it failed. It is highly unlikely that the Cyprus Presidency will now take it

over, so the proposal can be considered dead.

As Commissioner Dalli had already threatened Member States that he would resume authorising new GMOs for commercial growing if no agreement on the "renationalisation" proposal is reached, the Greens/EFA group wrote to him immediately after the Council to urge him not to proceed with new authorisations as this would only jeopardise public confidence and trust in the scientific assessment agencies and the Commission itself, and increase public protests and rejection of GMOs.

7th GMO-free regions conference

Six years after the first GMO-free regions conference in Berlin, the movement is stronger than ever and the Greens/EFA group is pleased to host the official part of the the 7th GMO-free regions conference in the European Parliament on September 5th.

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.

The day before, Tuesday September 4th, NGOs and activists will meet in the afternoon at Mundo-B.

http://www.greens-efa.eu/gmo-free-europe-conference-2012-7407.html

Registration: http://www.gmo-free-regions.org/gmo-free-conference-2012/registration.html

Program: http://www.gmo-free-regions.org/gmo-free-conference-2012/program.html

Biopatents

On May 10th, the European Parliament adopted a resolution calling on the European Patent Office and the European Commission to ensure European legislation prohibiting the patenting of plant or animal breeding is respected *(See GMO In(digest) 2)*. The resolution was jointly tabled by Members of Parliament from several parties, including Green MEPs Martin Haüsling and Margrete Auken and was adopted with a large majority.
http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P7-TA-2012-0202+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN

MEPs have sent a clear and strong message to the European Patent Office that it must stop patenting plant or animal breeding. But this is only a first step against the attempts from multinational agrochemical companies to appropriate genetic resources with sophisticated patent claims, and we need to insure that the farmers' and breeders' rights are included in the upcoming Unitary Patent.

Although this new EU-wide patent system does not specifically deal with patents on plants or animals, Greens/EFA want to include free access to breeding material and its independent usage – including materials already patented, for farmers and breeders, in order to insure farmers and breeders retain unhindered access to genetic resources.

http://www.no-patents-on-seeds.org/en/information/news/european-parliament-votes-against-patents-plants-and-animals

Science

Following a request by the Commission after a written question from MEPs José Bové and Sandrine Bélier *(See GMO In(digest) 2)*, EFSA reviewed the scientific content of a new study by Zhang et al., who found that so called micro RNAs from plants can regulate the expression of target genes in mammals http://www.nature.com/cr/journal/vaop/ncurrent/full/cr2011158a.html.

EFSA GMO Panel acknowledges that "GM plants in which changes in gene expression are targeted using micro RNA will need to be addressed" (information accessed via EFSA register: http://registerofquestions.efsa.europa.eu/roqFrontend/questionsListLoader?panel=ALL). It means that this new study may indeed have consequences for risk assessments of GMOs. In a letter to EFSA, Monsanto had claimed that no new risks can be identified from this study. Meanwhile, Commissioner Dalli has not yet answered to the MEPs about what the Commission will be doing. We're going to remind him.

LLP in food

Tiny amounts of unapproved GMOs will be permitted in food imports to the EU under draft rules due to be proposed shortly, EU officials said on June 11th. Last year, EU approved a similar law allowing up to 0.1 percent of unapproved GMO material in animal feed imports, after several shipments from the United States were blocked at EU ports after unapproved GM material was found in some cargoes. "The European Commission has said it wants to tackle this issue before the end of this year, and we will table a proposal in the very near future," Commission spokesman for health and consumers Frederic Vincent said.

The Greens/EFA group is totally opposed to such a proposal that is making a mockery of the EU GMOs authorization system and opens the door to uncontrollable genetic contamination of our food supply by unauthorized GMOs.
German farm Minister Ilse Aigner said she would oppose any EU proposal to end the bloc's zero-tolerance stance on unapproved GMOs in human food."
http://in.reuters.com/article/2012/06/11/eu-gmo-food-idINL5E8HB9Q320120611

MS/EU news:

Plant research in Europe: Few new GM plants

The number of GMOs experimental field trials is decreasing in Europe, except in Spain, and only a few of the new releases relate to research and development projects involving plants with new or improved traits.

By May 2012, only 41 new release applications had been submitted for GM plants in the EU for 2012. It was more than 100 in 2009. 30 of the new applications for 2012 come from Spain. The remaining 11 come from Sweden, Ireland, Denmark, Germany, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia.

Of the 41 new applications, 27 involve cultivation trials being conducted by large companies like BASF and Bayer with GM plants that have already been developed. Almost all of these are taking place in Spain and involve testing maize, cotton and sugar beet that are resistant to pests or herbicides. Only ten of the new release applications relate to projects for the development of plants with new or improved traits.

http://www.gmo-safety.eu/news/1416.plant-research-europe-genetic-engineering-field-trials.html

While it is encouraging to see less experimental field trials of GMOs in the EU, scientific research on sustainable farming, based on agronomic knowledge and positive interactions with natural ecosystems need to be encouraged in order to develop ways of farming that promote food safety and food sovereignty.

Belgium

Trial of the GMO potatoe

The trial of the activists that neutralized an experimental field trial of a GMO potatoe opened in Termonde on May 8th.

On May 29th, 2011, several hundreds of EU citizens have replaced GMO potatoes with conventional ones in an experimental field trial in Wetteren (Flanders). 11 of them have been picked up by the authorities to be deferred at the tribunal.

Many participants to this civil disobedience activity, as well as scientists, intellectuals and politicians have decided to state their solidarity to the charged ones. MEP Bart Staes has come to the tribunal to express solidarity with the activists. Together with MEP José Bové, he also stated in a common press release the Greens/EFA group's solidarity with the defenders of agro biodiversity.

France

French moratorium threatened!

On May 21st, EFSA has published an opinion against the French moratorium on MON810; the only EU wide authorized GMO maize variety, from Monsanto.

On the basis of EFSA's opinion, the EU Commission may want to impose France to grow this GMO maize on its territory, at any time.

This would be seen as a provocation, as the opinion comes at a time when EFSA's credibility is seriously questioned (see AFSA above). It would be cynical to use the opinion of a discredited agency to impose the commercial growing of a GMO that the population rejects overwhelmingly because it does not believe in the agency's independence.

Around the world

Brazil

Brazilian court upholds farmers' complaint against Monsanto

On April 4th, a Rio Grande do Sul judge suspended royalties payments on Monsanto's transgenic soybean

seeds as these business practices violated the Brazilian Cultivars Act. According to the ruling in April, Monsanto would have to pay back all royalties collected since 2004, which amount to an estimated $6.2 billion, or else pay out a minimum of $2 billion in compensation. On June 12th, Supreme Court judges announced that the Southern judge's pronouncement is applicable nationwide.

Since the crops were legalised, farmers have been charged a 2 per cent royalty fee by the company, on top of the price they pay for their seeds. Farming unions in the country have said that this practice is unfair and amounts to forcing farmers cultivating the seeds to pay twice. They also claim the process is potentially implicating innocent farmers; the unions have said contamination of conventional soybeans with GM traits is common place and difficult to avoid. http://www.farming.co.uk/

USA

Now that in a few years only, the adoption of Round up Ready crops and the herbicide that comes along have created new strains of herbicide tolerant invasive weeds, Dow AgroSciences is hoping to market a new GMO maize that is tolerant to its herbicide 2,4-D, one of the active ingredients in Agent Orange. This is a perfect demonstration of the chemical-biotech treadmill that GMOs are leading to. However, this attempt to commercialize dangerous herbicide tolerant maize may be the trigger for action for US farmers and consumers. USDA has received over 365.000 public comments opposing approval of 2,4-D-resistant corn. Over 150 Farm, Fisheries, Public Health, Consumer, and Environmental Groups have also sent Secretary Vilsack a joint letter on potential threats of 2,4-D resistant maize to human health and American farms

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Opinion

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Study



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