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GMO (In)digest

Issue 13 of the GMO Campaign Newsletter



EU Work:

New GMO video animation from the Greens/EFA group in the EP

The group has created a new animated video called “You don't want GMOs in Europe? Neither do we.” that shows how important it is to vote for a GMO-free EU at the upcoming EU elections. It is very short (less than a minute), informative and compelling. There are English, French and German versions. Please share it as widely as possible: <http://gmo.greens-efa.eu/you-don-t-want-gmos-in-europe-12364.html>

Honey

See ([GMO \(In\)digest 12](#))

On 8 May, [the Council of Foreign Affairs approved](#) the directive amending Council directive 2001/110/EC relating to honey, following the agreement reached with the European Parliament at 1st reading, despite opposition from the Greens/EFA group. The directive provides that pollen is a natural constituent, and not an ingredient, of honey. This means that GMOs in honey will not have to be labelled, as is the case for other food products and means that consumers and small honey producers will be left in the dark about the presence of GMOs in their honey. It will also lead to beekeepers and honey producers being deprived of the means to impose isolation distances from their hives to protect their honey. The pressure from big honey packers and importers from countries that grow GMOs was enough to win the support of a majority of MEPs and the EU governments. Only Hungary and Luxembourg voted against the directive. It was the last step in the process and the directive will be published in the Official Journal of the

EU after being signed by the Presidents of the Council and of the European Parliament and will enter into force 20 days after its publication.

EFSA

See ([GMO \(In\)digest 9](#))

European Ombudsman criticizes EFSA twice for maladministration

Pesticide Action Network (PAN) Europe had shown in a [report](#) that 10 out of 13 members of EFSA Working Group on TTC (Threshold of Toxicological Concern), a statistical approach for risk assessment substituting safety testing, had been involved in promoting TTC in the past and many links with industry. The European Ombudsman [concluded](#) on March 28 that this was a case of maladministration. EFSA failed to start a thorough investigation, in the interest of maintaining public trust, after the publication of PAN Europe's report and also failed to reply to PAN Europe at all, presenting its views only after the opening of the Ombudsman's inquiry.

A second PAN allegation concerns two external meetings EFSA organized together with industry lobby group ILSI (international Life Sciences Institute), excluding other stakeholders such as environmental NGOs. The Ombudsman concluded that apart from one animal rights NGO, there were no environmental NGOs invited to either meeting. The Ombudsman stated she regrets EFSA's unwillingness to properly address PAN Europe's allegations and didn't accept EFSA's view that it didn't understand complainants' grievances. PAN Europe calls on EFSA to take acknowledge the verdict, revise their conflict of interest policy and withdraw the controversial opinion on TTC.

Food industry lobbyists proposed for EFSA Management Board

Representatives of the EU Member States decided at their meeting on 7 May to nominate [food industry lobbyists](#) to the Management Board of EFSA. Among the 7 members that it had to nominate, the Member States appointed Jan Mousing, who is a Director at the Danish Agriculture & Food Council, the lobby group representing the interests of the Danish food industry and Piet Vanthemsche, who represents farmers' union COPA but also sits on the board of MRBB holding company, an agri investment fund which has shares in companies selling GMOs. [Green/EFA MEP José Bové considered](#) that this decision *sent out a worrying signal concerning EFSA's independence and objectivity and that Member States do not appear to have understood how crucial it is for the EU agency regulating food safety to be entirely free from industry influence and conflicts of interest. He's calling on the EU Ministers, who will have the final say in Council, to refuse these unacceptable agreements with industry. On a more positive note, Ms Beate Kettlitz from FoodDrinkEurope (the umbrella lobby group representing the food industry in Brussels), has not been kept on the final list of candidates and a scientist member of the European Network of Scientists for Social and Environmental Responsibility (ENSSER), András Székács, was selected.*

EFSA Management Board appoints new Director

[Dr Bernhard Url](#) has been appointed Executive Director of EFSA by the Authority's Management Board after the European Parliament sent a letter to Sue Davies, chair of the Management Board, and to the Commission, to recommend his nomination to the position, following a hearing in the Environment Committee on April 14. Trained as a veterinarian in Vienna, Dr Url ran a food quality control laboratory from 1993 to 2002 and was then Managing Director of the Austrian Agency for Health and Food Safety for 10 years before joining EFSA as Director of Risk Assessment and Scientific Assistance. Dr Url committed to working towards more open risk assessment and further building trust. As we have seen, this is an important task and there is still a lot to do to rebuild trust in the European organisation that is dedicated to protecting the health of European consumers and which has been under a lot of criticism for the industry influence and conflicts of interest.

Renationalisation Proposal

See ([GMO \(In\)digest 12](#))

Discussions have been qualified as intense at the ad-hoc Working Group of governments' representatives that tried to get an agreement on the poisoned Greek Presidency proposal to allow Member States to ban a GMO that would have been authorised in the EU. The proposal does not make any mention of the necessity for improving the risk evaluation of GMOs as well as the authorisation procedure, which should be a prerequisite for any discussion on the possibility for Member States to refuse the cultivation of GMOs. It accords huge power to the biotechnology industry, which will be able to negotiate directly with governments on the possibility of a Member State banning or otherwise the cultivation of GMOs on their territory. A Member State's stated motives to justify its decision to ban a GMO, in cases where negotiations with industry fail, would have no legal weight faced with international trade agreements, such as the WTO. This proposal also fails to make any mention of the major issues of cross-border contamination and liability in case of genetic pollution. As it stands now, it would open the EU's doors to GMOs that EU citizens have been constantly rejecting for 15 years. Greens/EFA MEPs are writing to their environmental ministers to urge them not to accept such a dangerous proposal at the next Environment Council, at which they have claimed they want to adopt it.

GMO maize 1507

See ([GMO \(In\)digest 12](#))

[A new report](#) from the German NGO Testbiotech denounces industry influence on the risk assessment of GMO maize 1507 that the Commission wants to allow for cultivation in the EU. The analysis of peer-reviewed data on maize 1507 has not only revealed a major lack of independent data, but also that industry has a great deal of influence and that scientific networks work too closely with industry. Of 92 studies that were found to contribute to the risk assessment of maize 1507, only 15 were unlikely to have been impacted by industry bias. Research on the environmental risks of maize 1507 or Cry1F protein is dominated by a network of scientists who are not employed by industry but have strong links to industry. However, EFSA did not consider any possible bias of the available publications. The Commission must now reconsider the authorisation for this GMO.

Member State/EU news:

France

See ([GMO \(In\)digest 12](#))

Arrêté to ban cultivation of GMO maize MON810 maintained

On 5 May, the [French Conseil d'Etat decided](#) that the request from the maize producers' association and 2 farmers that had sown GMO maize before the arrêté was published, for an emergency cancellation of the arrêté was not justified. The merits of the arrêté will be judged in a few months, but the emergency was not deemed valid, because the arrêté did not cause an immediate and serious prejudice to the requesters' economic situation due to the very small proportion of GMO crops in their farms. As the arrêté is maintained, the cultivation of GMO maize is still illegal in France and the government stated that GMO maize fields need to be destroyed in order to avoid pollination. One of these fields was denounced on 2 May by the Faucheurs Volontaires and Greenpeace France, in a symbolic action with Green MEP José Bové.

Law to prohibit cultivation of GMO maize adopted in the National Assembly

[The French law](#) that bans cultivation of GMO maize was also adopted on this day, 5 May, by the Senate (172 in favour and 147 against). This is the same text that had been adopted in 1st reading by the National Assembly on 15 April after having been rejected by only two votes in the Senate on February 17. It has only one article, which says: cultivation of genetically modified maize varieties is prohibited. It means that any strain of GM maize that is adopted in the future at EU level, such as Pioneer 1507, will be banned in France.

Italy

Ban on cultivation of GMO maize upheld

See ([GMO \(In\)digest 10](#))

The Latium regional court has upheld [the country's national ban](#) on cultivation of GMO maize MON810, despite the complaint by a farmer from Frioul who wanted to plant this GMO maize. The ruling is based on the precautionary principle that allows the government to take protective measures before potential risks are fully identified. 39 groups involved in agriculture and the environment, such as Slow Food, Coldiretti, Greenpeace, Legambiente worked together in a task-force for a GMO-free Italy to get this result, which is a relief for producers that promote food quality products, and for the 80% of Italians that are opposed to GMOs.

Around the world

Argentina

Professor Andr s Carrasco passed away on 10 May. This is very sad news for all of us, and particularly in Latin America, who are trying to push for sustainable and ecological agricultural practices. He was the leading Argentinian scientist that reported on birth and neurological effects in amphibian embryos caused by Glyphosate/Roundup, an issue of major importance in Argentina, given the unrestrained development of Roundup Ready soybean in the country (it is estimated that 99 % of the soy that is grown in Argentina is Roundup tolerant) and the intense Roundup fumigations that go with the GMO soybean, exposing increasing populations to the toxic chemicals. Like many critical scientists, Prof. Carrasco was considerably harassed by the biotech lobby and the scientific institutions but bravely continued to defy them and fight for poisoned victims and it is thanks to his work that the Minister of Public Health recently announced that he now wants [an independent commission to investigate](#) cases of cancer and the incidence of children born with disabilities in the northerly province of Chaco. The Greens/EFA group in the EP feel privileged to have been able to meet him and work with him on several occasions and we wish to send our condolences to his family and all friends and colleagues in Buenos-Aires.

Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)

On the eve of technical consultations organized by the FAO in Rome on 20-21 March to review the extent and pattern of trade disruptions caused by contaminated shipments, FAO published the results of [a first survey](#) on low-level presence (LLP) of genetically modified crops in international food and feed trade. Among the results of the survey, 198 incidents were reported of low levels of GM crops mixed into non-GM crops between 2002 and 2012; there was also a jump in cases between 2009 and 2012, which accounts for 138 out of the 198 reported incidents; shipments with low levels of GM crops originated mainly from the US, Canada and China; once detected, most shipments were destroyed or returned to the exporting country; the highest number of incidents involved linseed, rice, maize and papaya. Even though the numbers of incidents are small relative to the millions of tonnes of food and feed traded every day, the increased production of GM crops around the globe has led to a higher number of incidents of low levels of GMOs being detected in traded food and feed. They have led to trade disruptions between countries

with shipments being blocked by importing countries and destroyed or returned to the country of origin. In the EU, the regulation on LLP in feed allows traces (up to 0.1%) of an unauthorized GMO in feed (if allowed in the country of origin) and the agri-food industry is lobbying hard to lift the so-called zero tolerance for unauthorized GMOs from food and seeds as well, which would amount to allowing unauthorized GMOs to be grown and multiply in the EU. The new European Parliament will have to resist this insidious penetration of GMOs in Europe.

Recommended

Press release

Bert Christiaens



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Press release

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