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GMO (In)digest

Issue 12 of the GMO Campaign Newsletter



EU Work:

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

The group has created a short (3mn55s) animated video that shows the reasons for our opposition to the cultivation of GMOs in a very plain and understandable manner. It is also quite entertaining. It now exists in 9 different languages (English, French, German, Italian, Finnish, Dutch, Czech, Danish, and Catalan) plus with International Sign interpretation, and comes with subtitles in most of these languages. Have a look at it at: <http://gmo.greens-efa.eu/305-our-videos.html> and do not hesitate to share it. It is a good campaigning tool, and as opposed to GMOs, its dissemination does not carry any hazard. If you are interested in more languages, contact us so we can see how to realise it.

1st GMO maize to be authorised in the EU in 15 years

See ([GMO \(In\)digest 11](#)) On 11 February the General Affairs Council opposed the [proposal](#) from the Commission to allow GMO maize 1507 from Dupont-Pioneer with a record number of 19 Member States voting against, while only 5 (Spain, UK, Sweden, Finland and Estonia) were in favour of the authorisation. However it failed to reach the Qualified Majority needed to reject the Commission's proposal. Despite this record opposition, as well as an EP [resolution](#) calling on the Commission to drop this authorisation, initiated by the Greens and voted by a wide majority (385-201-19) in the January session, and the opposition of the vast majority of EU citizens, Commissioner Borg stated that the Commission will authorise the cultivation of this controversial GMO maize. Abstaining Member States (Germany, Czech Republic, Portugal and Belgium) bear the responsibility of opening the EU to GMO cultivation as they

have prevented a Qualified Majority to be reached. The Greens/EFA group considers that it would be totally undemocratic and irresponsible for the Commission to go ahead with this authorisation at a time of EU elections in the midst of a strong anti-EU feeling. It announced that it would launch a motion of censure against the Commission if it does, and wrote a [statement](#) that has already been signed by enough MEPs (10%, i.e. 77 MEPs) to be able to start such an action immediately if the Commission goes ahead.

Renationalisation debate

See ([GMO \(In\)digest 11](#)) While announcing that the Commission will authorise GMO maize 1507, Health Commissioner Borg prompted Member States to resume the stalled talks about the Commission's proposal for a regulation amending directive 2001/18/EC as regards the possibility for Member States to restrict or prohibit the cultivation, in all or part of their territory, of GMOs that have been authorised at EU level (the so-called renationalisation proposal). The prospect of facing strong national opposition to the cultivation of the new GMO maize seems to have pushed some Member States to reconsider their earlier opposition to this toxic and dangerous proposal and the Greek Presidency was able to present a [draft text](#) to the 3 March Environment Council. MS have been invited to express whether they were willing to reopen the debate and if they were thinking that the proposal from the Presidency was a good basis for this discussion. A large majority of MS answered yes to both questions, meaning that the discussion is now launched with a view for an agreement at the June Council. Still, some MS expressed reservations, in particular with regards to the threats the proposal carries for the internal market and international agreements. Belgium was very opposed to the proposal while France came up with a different proposal that it claims to be legally much stronger. The authorisation process would be a two steps procedure, similar to the pesticides' authorisation procedure: the scientific risk assessment would lead to the inscription of the GMO on a positive list, and then the applicant would ask for national authorisations. France seemed rather isolated with its proposal and has even been accused of trying to gain time, as the proposal, which has been submitted very late, is very different from the Presidency and would need more time to work on. Germany and Bulgaria, nonetheless, said that the French proposal should still be considered. The Presidency's proposal has been slammed by NGOs as even worse than the Commission proposal because it allows direct negotiations behind closed doors between companies and governments during the authorisation process, giving companies undue power. It is also legally not safe vis-à-vis EU internal market rules and international agreements such as WTO and it will weaken MS' opposition to EU authorisations of GMO and requests for improved EU risk assessments.

Honey

See ([GMO \(In\)digest 11](#)) ENVI Committee MEPs have voted on 27 November 2013 with a large majority against the Girling report that prevents GMO labelling of contaminated honey by considering GMO pollen as a natural constituent of honey instead of an ingredient. But this large majority did not succeed in keeping the amendments in the Plenary that confirmed the AGRI Committee opinion to hide GMO from labelling in the case of honey. Rapporteur Julie Girling (ECR) was mandated to negotiate with Council and came up with a hypocritical compromise that was the Commission's proposal to consider pollen as a constituent of honey in order to prevent its labelling when GMO pollen is present in honey. On 19 March, the Environment Committee caved to the strong lobbying of the honey importers and packers and voted against its original recommendations of November 2013, approving with a small majority (28-26-2) the Girling report. The vote in plenary, which will be held in April, will probably be only a pro-forma confirmation of this wrong decision. The consequences will be that the decision of the European Court of Justice in 2011 that specified that honey contaminated with genetically modified pollen must be marked as such under EU law will be turned down, the consumers will not be informed whether the honey they buy contains GMOs and bee-keepers will be unable to request coexistence measures to insure that their honey does not contain GMOs, contrary to other farmers. Also, as the EU imports much of its honey from countries that grow GMOs and two of the main honey-producing Member States (Spain and Romania) do grow GMO maize, it is sure that honey containing GMO pollen will end up on EU shelves.

Questions for written answer to the Commission

See ([GMO \(In\)digest 11](#)) On the questions that Green MEP Sandrine Bélière had asked in November 2013 on the safety assessment of GMO maize MON810, the Commission only [answered](#) that the questions concern details of the risk assessment carried out by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), which has been requested to provide elements allowing the Commission to answer to the questions and that the information will be available shortly (E-12048/13 and E-12049/13). Green MEPs José Bové, Martin Häusling, Bart Staes and Margrete Auken asked the Commission [questions](#) on the 2-years toxicology study that it had decided to do after the publication of the Séralini study and whether the retraction of the study may revisit the planned study (E-014438/13). The Commission [answered](#) that the planned study does not aim to repeat the Séralini' one but rather to provide scientifically sound and independent data that will allow for drawing conclusions with regard to GMO risk assessment requirements and procedures in the EU. As such, the recent retraction of the Séralini study from the Journal of Food and Chemical Toxicology will have no impact on the planned 2-year feeding trials. Proposals have been evaluated by experts who were selected on the basis of their skills and knowledge of the area; the absence of conflict of interests was strictly enforced. Information on the selected project will be published only once the grant agreement has been established. The answer does not indicate a great level on transparency so far, and we fear that information may be released too late for any meaningful involvement of stakeholders and independent scientists, as nothing is in the public sphere yet. Green MEPs José Bové [questioned](#) the Commission about the status of its analyses seeking to establish whether the new techniques of biotechnology did, or did not, fall within the definition of GMO laid down in Article 2 of Directive 2001/18/EC (E-014424/13). The Commission [answered](#) that it is carrying out the analysis of the legal status of New Plant Breeding Techniques (NPBT) but there is no external group appointed by the Commission for the purpose; it has not organised any hearings with third parties on NPBT at this stage and did not produce official proceedings of the workshop held by the Institute for Prospective Technological Studies (IPTS) of May 2010, as the workshop was part of the integrated methodology that was used to map the development of NPBT in the EU and which resulted in one single report with the overall results. In short, nothing significant has been done so far by the Commission that seemed more interested in speeding up new GMO authorisations and its renationalisation proposal than elaborating on an accepted framework for assessing risks of new breeding technologies.

Seeds

Although it is not a GMO issue per se, there has been a lot happening on seeds in the EP in the last month. MEPs voted almost unanimously (650-15-17) to reject the controversial draft EU regulation on seed production and marketing in Plenary on 11 March (Silvestris report). The Greens have been pushing for the controversial proposal from the European Commission to be rejected as it would seriously hit small-scale farmers and seed breeders for the benefit of the biggest seed companies that are also the ones that produce GMOs. However, 2 initiative reports from AGRI Committee (*plant breeding: what options to increase quality and yields?*, from PAULSEN; and *the future of Europe's horticulture sector – strategies for growth*, from Mc Intyre) that are pure propaganda on the need to intensify production, with genetic engineering and new pesticides, have been voted by MEPs respectively in the plenary sessions of February and March. The need for GMOs in agriculture, among many other items on more intensification, more chemistry, more patents and more "modernisation", has sneaked into these 2 reports. The good thing is that none of them is legally binding, but there's little doubt that they will be used by the biotech industry lobby. For more information, check our Food Culture campaign at <http://eat-better.greens-efa.eu/361-our-news.html>

Member State/EU news:

France: Arrêté to ban cultivation of GMO maize MON810

See ([GMO\(In\)digest 10](#)) Since the cancellation of the French moratorium on the cultivation of GMO maize MON810 last August, the government has said that it is committed to maintaining the ban under

better legal grounds. On 4 February, socialist Senator Alain Fauconnier introduced in the Senate a [proposal for a law](#) to prohibit the use and cultivation of MON810 seeds, but the proposal has been unexpectedly [defeated](#) on 17 February in the Senate by only 2 votes (171-169) after pro-GMO UMP (right) Senator Jean Bizet had presented a motion to oppose the proposal on procedural grounds. The following day, Socialist MP Bruno Le Roux registered the same proposal at the [National Assembly](#) while Green MPs proposed a stronger [text of law](#) in order for France to ban all GMOs and not only GMO maize. During examination by the Sustainable Development Committee of the National Assembly, the amendments from the Greens were rejected. The socialist law proposal will be examined on 10 April, which is only after the sowing season has begun in France. To prevent cultivation of GMO maize in 2014, the government urgently passed an [Arrêté](#) on 14 March that prohibits the marketing, use and cultivation of GMO maize MON810 seeds until a definitive decision in application of Art. 18 of Directive 2002/53/CE about the common EU catalogue of plant varieties and of the EU measures from Article 54 of EC Regulation 178/2002 related to food safety. Organisations representing the seed companies and the maize growers lobby have already announced that they will attack the arrêté, showing their contempt for French citizens' opposition to GMOs.

Around the world

Canada

Canada Approves Commercial Scale Production of GM Salmon Eggs

In a decision buried in routine business in the Canada Gazette, Environment Canada said in December 2013 that it had granted a US biotechnology firm, AquaBounty Technologies Inc, [permission to export](#) up to 100,000 GM fish eggs a year from a hatchery in Prince Edward Island to a site in Panama despite acknowledging that the GM fish presented a high risk to Atlantic salmon, in the event of an escape. The decision marks the first time any government had given the go-ahead to commercial scale production involving a GMO food animal, even though it is not yet approved for human consumption. The GM Atlantic salmon uses growth genes from a Chinook salmon and a seal eel which enables the fish to grow twice as fast as a regular fish. AquaBounty has been raising GM salmon for several years on an experimental basis, growing fish eggs at a lab in PEI and then flying them to a test site at a secretive inland location in Panama, where they were grown to full size, and then ultimately destroyed. However, environmental groups in Panama are concerned that the AquaBounty site was operating without the necessary permits and inspections. The Panamanian test site has had a history of mishaps. In 2008, a storm destroyed part of the facility, according to a filing to the FDA. In 2010, an entire batch of fingerlings died in transit, according to Panamanian officials. In December of 2013, [Ecology Action Centre](#) (EAC) and [Living Oceans Society](#) (LOS) [brought a legal action against the Ministers of Environment Canada and Health Canada](#), as well as AquaBounty Canada Inc., asking the Federal Court to decide if the Canadian government violated its own law when it permitted the manufacture of GM salmon to proceed. On 10 March, 2014 the [Canadian Biotechnology Action Network disclosed that an investment filing](#) at the London Stock Exchange confirmed that AquaBounty is now also seeking approval for human consumption of its GM salmon in Canada. In contrast, Health Canada has consistently refused to confirm or deny that AquaBounty had made any application for approval to sell the genetically modified fish in Canada. <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2013/nov/25/canada-genetically-modified-salmon-commercial> <https://www.ecologyaction.ca/press-release/genetically-modified-salmon-court-case-prompts-federal-government-publish-vague-notice>

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Bert Christiaens

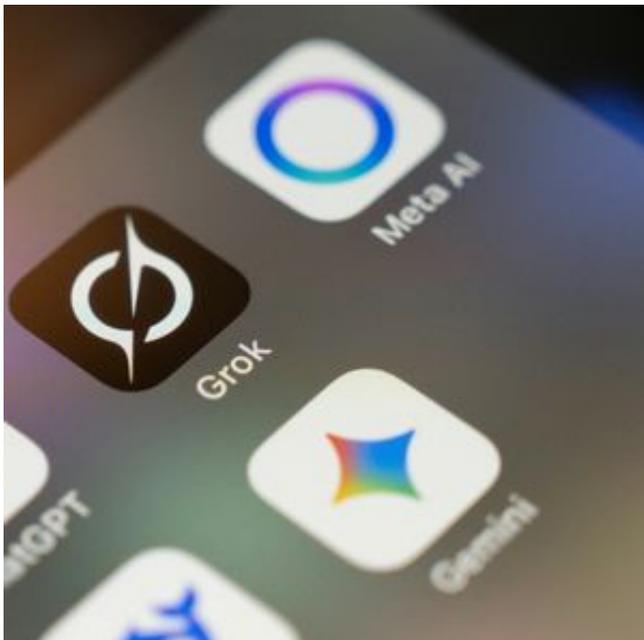


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