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GMO (In)digest

Issue 14 of the GMO Campaign Newsletter



EU Work:

Renationalisation Proposal

See ([GMO \(In\)digest 13](#)) EU Governments' representatives agreed at a Coreper meeting on 28th May to send the draft Greek Presidency proposal to allow Member States to ban a GMO that would have been authorised in the EU to the Environment Council on 12th June with the aim of reaching a political agreement. Despite its obvious [shortcomings](#), some of which have been paid a minimum lip service by a few Member States, the proposal has been supported by 26 of the 28 Member States. Only Belgium, and more notably Luxembourg, which asked that its statement be annexed to the report of the Council, abstained. It is encouraging to see that some Member States have clearly stated they wanted to remain GMO free, such as Slovenia, Luxembourg, Cyprus, Poland, Bulgaria..., but rather sad that they did not want to see that getting an illusory (and legally very weak) right to ban a GMO nationally will probably be at the expense of a more robust EU risk assessment and authorisation process that puts a GMO-free EU at risk. The position of the Council needs now to be formally adopted, and the Italian Presidency should start negotiations with the EP in second reading in the fall. It has stated that the adoption of the proposal would be a priority and will put pressure on the EP for a fast adoption of its 2nd reading report in order to be finalised by the Council in December. At the 1st Environment Committee coordinators' meeting in Strasbourg on 14th July, the 2 main groups, EPP and S&D, as well as ALDE, have agreed to try to meet the unrealistic timeframe imposed by the Presidency, despite the EP report from 2011 (Lepage report) and the Council position being very far apart. MEP Frédérique Ries (ALDE) will be the rapporteur, taking over from Corinne Lepage, who has not been re-elected, and present her report at the beginning of

September. The Greens/EFA group believes that this compromise is a [Trojan horse](#) for GMOs in Europe and will push for rejection of the provisions that aim to give biotech companies a negotiating power with elected governments on whether they are allowed to restrict the cultivation of GMOs on their territory, as this constitutes an unacceptable breach of democracy. We are also asking for a strengthening of the EU process as a prior step to giving more grounds for a Member State to ban a GMO, as well as more legal safety for potential national bans by including environmental concerns as legitimate ones.

No opinion for renewal of authorisation of GMO maize NK603

Having failed to reach a Qualified Majority in favour of the proposal from the Commission for the renewal of the authorisation of the placing on the market of maize NK603 from Monsanto at the Standing Committee of the Food Chain and Animal Health (SCoFCAH) meeting, the draft measure was submitted to the Appeal Committee (set up by the new comitology process) on 10th July. The result of the vote was identical with 13 countries voting in favour of the renewal (Bel, Cz, Dk, Est, Ire, Esp, NL, Port, Rom, Svk, Fln, Swe, UK), 11 against (Bul, Gre, Cyp, Lat, Lith, Lux, Hun, Mal, Aus, Pol, Sln) and 4 abstentions (D, Fr, It, Hr). It is rather shocking that the renewal has not been rejected, as this specific GMO is precisely the one that had been the centre of a huge controversy after the only life-long toxicological study on a GMO showed potential serious health impacts. It is also the GMO for which Monsanto has withdrawn the application for cultivation in the EU (see below). The vote came only a few days after the controversial study has been republished in a science journal (see around the world, below). The final decision is now in the hands of the Commission, which is not bound to give its authorisation, according to the new comitology rules. [The Greens/EFA group](#) is calling on the Commission not to renew the authorisation of this dangerous product.

Withdrawal of 10 applications for the cultivation of GMO crops in the EU

At the SCoFCAH meeting on 23rd May, information was given that Monsanto has withdrawn eight applications for cultivation of GMOs in the EU, including soybean 40-3-2 and maize NK603, both tolerant to Monsanto's herbicide Round-up. This is probably the result of the increasing pressure for herbicide-tolerant GMO crops to be more thoroughly assessed, in particular with regards to the changes in herbicide use that comes with these crops and the advent of herbicide-tolerant weeds, and to renewed concerns about the toxicity of the Round-up herbicide. The six other applications that Monsanto has withdrawn were for GMO maize and sugar beet: maize MON89034 x MON88017; MON89034; MON89034 x NK603; NK603 x MON810; MON88017; and sugar beet H7-1. There is now only one application for cultivation left by Monsanto, for the renewal of the GMO maize MON 810 authorisation. MON 810 produces a Bt insecticidal protein and is the only GMO crop that is allowed for cultivation in the EU as of today. In addition, the register of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) shows that DuPont/Pioneer has recently withdrawn two applications for the cultivation of GMO maize with stacked genes, 1507xNK603 and 59122x1507xNK603. These withdrawals show that the biotech industry is pulling out of the cultivation of transgenic crops in the EU, according to German NGO [Testbiotech](#). Still nine applications from 3 companies (Pioneer, Syngenta and Bayer) for cultivation of GMOs in the EU remain. In addition to the renewal of MON810, the following eight applications are pending: maize 1507 by Pioneer (insect toxicity, herbicide tolerance), which could be authorized anytime now since the Council had not reached a qualified majority to oppose it despite [a record number of opposing Member States](#); maize 59122 by Pioneer (insect toxicity, herbicide tolerance); maize 1507x59122 by Pioneer (insect toxicity, herbicide tolerance); maize Bt11 by Syngenta (insect toxicity, herbicide tolerance); maize GA21 by Syngenta (herbicide tolerance); maize MIR604 by Syngenta (insect toxicity); maize Bt11xMIR604xGA21 by Syngenta (insect toxicity, herbicide tolerance); and cotton GHB614 by Bayer CropScience (herbicide tolerance).

Mr Juncker elected as President of the Commission

Mr. Juncker was elected by the EP on 15th July with 422 out of 729 votes. He will replace Mr Barroso in November. In the meanwhile, he will have the task of constituting the new Commission. The Greens/EFA

group [welcomes](#) his seemingly precautionary approach to GMOs that will hopefully contrast to the adamantly pro-GMO position of his predecessor. The issue of GMOs is addressed in his political guidelines that he distributed to MEPs on the eve of the election: “I also intend to review the legislation applicable to the authorisation of Genetically Modified Organisms. To me, it is simply not right that under the current rules, the Commission is legally forced to authorise new organisms for import and processing even though a clear majority of Member States is against. The Commission should be in a position to give the majority view of democratically elected governments at least the same weight as scientific advice, notably when it comes to the safety of the food we eat and the environment in which we live.” This was reiterated in his address to the MEPs Plenary. As the 2nd reading of the “opt-out” proposal is getting under way, it will be indeed urgent to review the risk assessment and authorisation process of GMOs in order to insure that the EU can be protected from GMOs.

Member State/EU news:

Germany

German poultry producers to drop non-GMO feed

The conglomerate of German poultry associations, ZDG, has announced poultry producers are backing away from their 14-year commitment to using only non-GMO soybeans, creating an uproar among retailers that are selling GMO-free fed poultry products. The poultry producers claim that reduced supplies and higher prices for non-GMO soybeans are the reasons for their decision, which is in contradiction with the [information supplied by Abrange](#), the Brazilian National Association of non-GMO soybean producers. Consumers’ organisation Foodwatch sent a [35.000 signatures petition](#) to McDonald’s Germany to ask that the group reject GMO feed or, at a minimum, to inform clearly about their use.

Around the world

Séralini study republished

In September 2012 Prof. Séralini and his team published the results of the [first lifelong toxicological experiment](#) on rats with a GMO maize (NK603, from Monsanto) in the peer reviewed scientific journal Food and Chemical Toxicology (FCT). The study showed increased mortality, tumours and a number of pathological effects... Immediately after its publication, it was subject to a huge controversy organised by a network of pro-GMO scientists. EFSA, national food agencies, academies, all condemned the study, which is not surprising since they had all previously given positive opinions for the marketing of this GMO. Despite the trashing, it had to be recognised that long-term studies had never been realised. The French government, as well as the Commission, decided to launch one. A few months later, after having hired an ex-Monsanto employee as head of its editorial board for biotechnology issues, the editor of FCT took in November 2013 the very unusual step of retracting the article, although he acknowledged that he did not find any fraud or wrongdoing from the authors. The extraordinary reason to retract the paper was that it was deemed inconclusive in the links it makes between the GMO feed and increase in cancer rates. This is indeed extraordinary because the word “cancer” is not even mentioned once in the article, which is a toxicological study and not an oncological one. The retraction has been condemned by [scientists](#) around the world as an act of industry-lead censorship. The retraction indeed means erasing this important study from the scientific literature and prevents others to use it, work on it or quote it. This has now been repaired as the peer reviewed scientific open source journal Environmental Sciences Europe (ESEU) published a modified and extended [version of the article](#) on 24th June. In the same issue of ESEU, the authors write also a [chronology of the attacks](#) on their paper that show the increasing influence of industry on the contents of scientific publications, as well as the numerous conflicts of interest among experts that are assessing GMO applications. Finally, the team also published the raw data used for the study, in order to allow the scientific community to use them to confirm or deny the conclusions of the article. This highlights the fact that the raw data from industry on which EFSA and national food safety agencies rely for their risk assessment has not been made public, under the dubious reason of commercial business

information. The Greens/EFA group welcomes this republication that will allow scientists to use this work for further analysis and congratulates ESEU for this. Given the importance of insuring the safety of GMOs and the worrying findings of this study, it renews its call for another lifelong independent long term toxicological study to be implemented. It is concerned that a representative of Monsanto sits in the steering committee for the French study and that this study could last 6 months instead of two years. This would not allow for any comparison with Séralini's team's publication. The group also calls for all the data that are used for GMOs' risk assessment be made public, as it is the only way to make sure independent scientists can have access to them and perform independent analyses. Until GMOs' risk assessment is considerably improved, no new GMO should be authorised. In this respect, we are very concerned that the Commission may soon renew the authorisation of the same GMO maize (NK603) that has been shown to be linked to health impacts.

US

Vermont passed first GMO labelling bill in the country

On 8th May Vermont became the first state in the country to require the labelling of GMO foods with Governor Peter Shumlin (D) signing Act 120. The Legislature had passed the labelling law in April, and Gov. Peter Shumlin signed [the bill](#) in May. The bill provides for mandatory labelling of GMO in foods beginning 1st July, 2016. In anticipation of a lawsuit, officials were so sure of a challenge that the measure itself creates a \$1.5 million legal defence fund, to be paid for with settlements won by the state. Indeed, it was not long before four national organisations whose members would be affected by Vermont's new labelling law for genetically engineered foods filed [a lawsuit](#) on 12th June in federal court challenging the measure's constitutionality. After years of rapid adoption of GMO crops in the USA in the absence of any public information, the issue of labelling GMOs in food products is gathering steam in the country. Other states have pursued similar measures as Vermont. At least 25 states have considered such legislation, according to a recent report on labelling requirements from the Council for Agricultural Science and Technology, unsuccessfully in most cases due to very strong and well-funded campaigns against labelling from the agri-food corporations. All labelling laws are fiercely fought by the agri-food companies, which [argue](#) that such laws are costly and bad for consumers. Indeed, as has been shown in the EU, informing the consumers about GMOs is a real threat for the profits of these companies and like everywhere in the world, US citizens would probably avoid GMO foods if they were informed. Connecticut and Maine also [passed labelling requirements](#), but with trigger clauses requiring neighbouring states to pass labelling requirements before their own go into effect. And advocates are hopeful they will get a measure on the Oregon ballot this year. The Greens/EFA group welcomes all initiatives to label GMOs and encourages governors of other states to present such labelling bills. It could be the trigger to turn the tide of GMOs in the country and in the world. Good luck Vermont!

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