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# The situation of EU sugar beet farmers made worse by a GM sugar beet from Monsanto

## EU farmers need a true shift to agroecology

European sugar beet producers have been suffering in recent years from a succession of transformations of the sector and low market prices. Some Member States have been using the farmers' difficult situation as an excuse to lift the EU ban on three neonicotinoids - the famous bee-toxic pesticides. And yet, it seems that some of the same Member States are willing to let imported GM sugar beet flood the EU market.

**EU sugar beet farmers in a difficult position**

The recent confirmation of the ban of the three most used neonicotinoid pesticides in the EU is without a doubt the best news of the year for biodiversity, as these insecticides have been proven to be the main cause for high mortality rates of bees in intensive farming areas[1]. However, until the end, the sugar beet sector and some Member States have been arguing against the ban, or at least in favour of a derogation for sugar beet farmers, highlighting the current dire situation of the market as their main argument.

The EU is the 3rd producer of sugar in the world, and almost 17 million tons of sugar beets are produced every year in the Union. But this sector is today far from healthy. "*The end of sugar quotas, combined with a depressed world market, have generated prices that are at their lowest level since the establishment of the European Commission Price Reporting System almost twelve years ago.*" explains CIBE[2]. In this context, the strong and legitimate demands from citizens for an ecological transition of the EU food and farming system have not been well received by many sugar beet farmers.

**A genetically modified sugar beet entering the EU**

And yet, despite this problematic situation, 13 Member States, including Germany (2nd producer of sugar beet in the EU after Croatia[3]) just voted in favour of the renewal of the authorization of use in food and feed of the genetically modified sugar beet H7-1 (from Monsanto) in the EU. This GM beet, mainly cultivated in the US and Canada, is tolerant to glyphosate, which means it has probably been dosed with this dangerous herbicide during its whole growing period[4]. For this reason, among others, the European Parliament voted today by a wide majority against this authorization (the 23rd objection of its kind in 3 years), but the final decision rests in the hands of the EU Commission.

Most sugar beets are processed locally, so there is more chance of GM sugar pulp and sugar made from GM sugar beets being imported in the EU, rather than the GM beets themselves. According to EU law,

those products would have to be labelled as GMOs. But in the case of produce from animals, such as milk, meat, and eggs, which have been fed on GM feed, there is no obligation for labelling, so consumers are none the wiser. . Ironically, bee farmers are amongst the biggest clients of the sugar industry, as they feed sugar to the bees during winter - it is thus highly possible that EU honey bees might be increasingly fed with genetically modified and glyphosate contaminated North American sugar, with the honey also not being labelled as such

**A shift to agroecology with, and for, our farmers**

We fail to understand the logic behind the decisions of the EU Commission and Member States. Banning three neocotinoids in the EU was a necessary step and the quasi-absence of GMO crops in the EU is directly linked to EU citizens' strong refusal of this technology. But the consequence should not be to submit EU farmers to an unfair competition, without any tools for them to differentiate their products to the consumers and with very few support for them to switch their systems.

The Greens/EFA in the European Parliament fight for a transition towards a fairer and more environmentally and health friendly agriculture. This shift to agroecology is not a move which should be done against the EU farmers but with and for them. This means the will of EU citizens should also apply to imports and that they should be able to make an informed choice when buying products thanks to labelling. This also means EU farmers should be supported in the transition to come. Only a radical change of the EU Common Agricultural Policy will permit it and we are working for this outcome!

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[1] It is though problematic that it required years to ban these products when the initial assessment should have prevented them to be authorised at all

[2] The International federation of European Beet Growers

[3] Source Eurostat

[4] See Genetically Modified Herbicide-Tolerant Crops, Weeds, and Herbicides: Overview and Impact, 2016, Sylvie Bonny

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**Contact person**



Juliette Leroux

Advisor on Agriculture and Rural Development

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