

Declaration from the campaign:

Sowing the Future - Harvesting Diversity



Access to seeds is a human right

Crop diversity is the fruit of thousands of years of human activity throughout the world. It is a common good and belongs to everyone. Ensuring access to this diversity is fundamental for our daily bread and to achieving food sovereignty. In many regions of the world farmers continue to produce, exchange and sell their own seeds.

The European Union has decided to change its seed legislation by 2011. The seed industry wants to secure intellectual property rights and the patenting of its crop varieties. It also seeks stronger control or even the prohibition of all non-registered varieties created by generations of farmers and gardeners.

Ten companies, among them Bayer, Monsanto, Syngenta and Limagrain, already control 67% of the world seed market. They want to conquer the rest of the market and thereby impose their registered varieties on the rest of the world, varieties which generally only thrive with the help of chemical fertilizers, pesticides and irrigation. However, it is not these genetically homogenous industrial seed varieties which will be able to feed the world in the future. We should put our trust in the diverse, regional varieties which are capable of adapting to climate change.

The negotiations on the new European seed legislation are taking place behind closed doors, among representatives of the seed industry and EU bureaucrats. In such circumstances we can hardly expect a positive outcome. In order to influence the new seed laws we must raise public awareness for our goals.

We demand:

- the right to produce our seeds from our own harvests, to re-sow and to give them to others;
- the promotion of regional crop variety by supporting the men and women who keep and breed organic varieties;
- the prohibition of genetic technologies in agriculture;
- the prohibition of patents on plants;
- a new law for the introduction of new seed varieties which excludes GMOs and varieties that require intensive chemical use;
- an end to high energy inputs in agriculture which are the result of monocultures, long transport routes as well as industrial crops that require chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

Over 50.000 people have signed this petition and have endorsed its demands. On 18 April 2011 we handed over the signatures to the Vice President of the European Parliament, Isabelle Durant, and to MEPs Marc Tarabella and Kriton Arsenis.

We call upon the Subcommittee for Human Rights of the European Parliament to investigate whether the planned new seed laws of the European Union violate the human right to food.

When the question of “Rights on Seeds” is brought up, it is usually about the rights of commercial plant breeders and agribusinesses, about rights on protected varieties and patents. However another right **in relation to seeds is much more important : the human right to food.** The right to food is internationally recognized in Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and

Cultural Rights. This article recognises the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food and of course to be free from hunger. Olivier de Schutter, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food writes in a report to the UN General Assembly: “Laws that prevent peasants from having access to seed can be violating the right to food”, and continues, “they would deprive peasants of their livelihoods.”

Free access to seeds is particularly important for smallholders in so-called developing countries. They buy and exchange their traditional seeds through informal and local networks, and they develop these seeds according to climatic, ecological and cultural requirements. These informal networks are vital, because in this way smallholders need only little or no money to have this crucial access to seeds. In addition, agricultural diversity is sustained through the exchange of seeds. The development of locally adapted varieties is also important for commercial breeding. Ensuring that peasants have free access to seeds and are able to use them without any restrictions is in the interest of all people.

Seeds of plants which have been used and bred using traditional methods for hundreds or even thousands of years do not need market access controls.

Peasant rights and the free access to seeds are limited by the European seed laws (plant variety protection and marketing access regulations) and their planned reinforcement. This represents an attack on the human right to food. Olivier de Schutter called attention to this threat for smallholders in his report “Seed policies and the right to food: enhancing agrobiodiversity and encouraging innovation” published in 2009 (www.srfood.org).

The EU Directorate-General for Health & Consumers (DG SANCO) which is responsible for these matters has declared the worldwide enforcement of these European regulations as an explicit goal.

The issue of seeds – literally a matter of survival – must not be negotiated only in the DG SANCO.

Therefore we turn directly to the Sub-Committee for Human Rights of the European Parliament and call on this Sub-committee to become involved in the discussion about the new seed laws and to insist that these meet the requirements of the human right to food and thus the free access to seeds.

Furthermore we demand that the revision of European seed legislation is carried out by the Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development and that in this work it takes into account the demands in the above-mentioned petition.

The Organizers of the Seed Campaign:

- *European Civic Forum*
- *BUKO-Campaign against Biopiracy*
- *Arbeitsgemeinschaft bäuerliche Landwirtschaft (AbL)*

www.seed-sovereignty.org