

GM wheat – a new (far distant) horizon

In May three Canadian grain growers' groups published an "accord" with growers in the US and Australia to "ensure the commercial introduction of biotech traits in wheat will proceed smoothly by synchronizing regulatory approvals in exporting and importing nations".

In a prompt response, a host of activist, farming and scientific groups from the three countries issued a "Definitive Global Rejection of Genetically Engineered Wheat". They cite consumer rejection and lack of agronomic benefits, adding, "Locally-bred varieties are critical to ensuring local food supplies during times of weather-related disasters." The comprehensive statement says that multinational companies "have played an insignificant role in fundamental wheat seed development", but that adopting GM wheat would put future control of the seed supply in their hands, with cross-contamination of GM threatening the survival of

successful local varieties.

The statement came hard on the heels of the Canadian Wheat Board's refusal to sign the pro-GM statement. While they are not opposed to GM, they said present consumer resistance is too high, and that "unresolved issues" around segregation from non-GM "limit the viability" of GM wheat.

Exports account for some 82% of Canada's wheat crop, and buyers say they would go elsewhere if any of Canada's crop is GM, which is expected to inevitably contaminate wheat production and handling systems, crippling conventional and organic sellers alike – a lesson North American farmers have learned the hard way with soya, canola and rice.

One Canadian farmer said, "As long as companies like Monsanto have two nickels to rub together they will always be able to find groups that will lobby for their interests."

Monsanto announced in 2004 that it had shelved its GM Roundup Ready wheat project.



Grain storage silos in a wheat field on the prairie, Alberta, Canada. KAREN MASSIER

TAKE ACTION

Freeze a friend

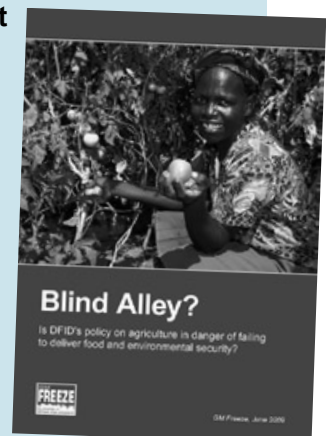
Like others around us, GM Freeze is feeling the effects on our finances of global economic events. We need your help.

If you can consider making an additional contribution to our work, we'd be very grateful. However, it would be better for us, for you and for the work if you could find just one friend to join us.

We have free leaflets available, you'll find a copy of our latest report

enclosed to show folks what we do, and people can join or donate online by clicking the link at the bottom of page www.gmfreeze.org/.

We reckon you must know at least one person who wants us to fight GM food and crops. Help us by introducing them to our work. Many thanks.



The GM Freeze Campaign is calling on the Government for a Freeze on:

- The growing of genetically modified plants and the production of genetically modified farm animals for any commercial purpose.
- Imports of genetically modified foods, plants, farm crops and farm animals, and produce from genetically modified plants and animals.
- The patenting of genetic resources for food and farm crops.

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Thin Ice



the GM Freeze Campaign newsletter

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GM in the EU – tides turning, or swirling?

In addition to the EU Commission's failed attempt to force countries to lift their bans on GM MON810 maize (see *Thin Ice 14*), other developments may be signalling changes in the way the EU handles GM approvals.

There is growing debate about a contentious proposal by The Netherlands to devolve licensing of GMOs for cultivation to member states (decisions on GM imports would remain at EU level). The Dutch point to the current system's failure to take account of new developments, public concerns or socio-economic impacts, and nine unnamed member states out of 27 are said to be supportive of the proposal. The UK position is not known.

The Health Commissioner reportedly replied that the current legal framework on GMOs is fully comprehensive. The Commission cited a unanimous vote in December by Environment Ministers to strengthen the system, saying there is no mandate to change the approval process.

The Netherlands' voting record on GMOs is pro-GM, so the motivations for, as well as pros and cons of, such proposals must be carefully evaluated. No GM crop has been approved for cultivation in the EU since 1998, frustrating pro-GM countries such as The Netherlands and UK.

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Also in March the European Parliament overwhelmingly rejected the authorisation of food products from cloned animals and their offspring, demanding a specific Commission proposal to prohibit cloning of animals for food and the import of such products.

Germany banned the cultivation of MON810 in April (joining France, Germany, Austria and Hungary) citing environmental and economic impacts. Beekeepers in Bavaria are struggling with problems from Mon 810 cultivation – a court ruled that honey with a 7% pollen content from the GM maize could not be sold, and a ruling on compensation is expected.

Monsanto's immediate application to have the ban overturned in time for 2009 plantings was rejected. The court found the Government had not been arbitrary or biased since

German law does not require proof that a crop is dangerous, but that indications of danger were sufficient to warrant such a decision.

Germany's farm Minister ("Genetic engineering for agriculture has no benefits") recognised that despite cross-party support an outright GM ban is not a political reality at present, so she is said to be investigating means to devolve decisions on GM cultivation to Germany's regional governments, as well as exploring the possibility of German national law defining GM-free regions.

In May Greece extended its 2005 ban on MON810 for another two years, increasing the number of seed types covered from 70 to 100. Elsewhere, Latvia's Supervisory Council for GMOs banned cultivation in the country, saying approvals for sales will have to be "examined beforehand", and Lithuania is said to be moving toward a full ban on GM cultivation, GM-free labels and zones and even a requirement to sell GM products from separate shelves in shops.

While such developments show that devolving decision making on GM would be good for some, pro-GM Governments, like the UK, would have an open door to pursue their policies, and there is a risk of splintering the EU anti-GM movement.



Not getting the message?

Seen at the European Parliament in the run-up to the June elections, a number of banners advertised topics of concern to European voters (“It’s your choice”). One eye-catching image suggests three choices for agriculture: organic, conventional and GM.

Surprising considering that polls across Europe continue to show widespread rejection of at least one of those “choices”. Recent polls show:

- Around 75% of Luxembourg residents oppose growing or selling GM food, while 83% of the citizens plus two thirds of all communities reject the technology.
- More than three quarters of all Germans want food



retailers and the wider industry to use the new “without GM” label for products from animals fed a non-GM diet.

- Approximately 76% of French people support their new “without GM feed” label, and 86% want the label to say “Fed without GMOs minimum guarantee 99.1%”. Some 93% find it “abnormal” that producers using GM feed are not obliged to say so on their labels.
- Nearly 80% of Swedish farmers with more than 20 hectares are not interested in using either GM crops or animal feed.
- 90% of Australian shoppers want the presence of GM ingredients clearly labelled on all food products.

IN BRIEF

■ The May conference of the Roundtable on Responsible Soya in Brazil was rather a damp squib. Supposed to launch their criteria for “responsible” soya, the grouping instead announced “a 12-month field test period to trial [their] initiatives”. Given scathing criticism of the Roundtable on Responsible Palm Oil for producing an expensive product no one will buy that fails to halt forest destruction, the results of the “field test” will be interesting indeed.

■ No word yet from Defra on the location of that Somerset GM contamination (see *Thin Ice 14*) – we’re still trying ...

■ Following our meeting in Parliament at which Professor Seralini from CRIIGEN outlined his findings on the toxicity of glyphosate, we’ve produced a briefing with the Professor to help spread the word. See the publications page of our website at <http://www.gmfreeze.org/page.asp?ID=368&iType=1084> – if it isn’t there yet, it will be soon.

■ Chinese rice products are still suffering from the 2006 contamination by BT63 – a variety not approved for sale in either China or the EU. In May Irish authorities destroyed a shipment of Ideal Foods (sic) brand rice flour found to contain Bt63 and alerted other EU countries to be on the lookout for contamination in further shipments.

INTERNATIONAL ROUND UP

Africa

South Africa

Farmers are reeling from the failure of three GM maize crops (MON810, NK603 and MON810 x NK603), prompting severe criticism of the Government backing GM for improved productivity. Losses for the 280 affected farmers are estimated at between 80,000 and 150,000 tons of grain, up to 80% failure for some farms. Monsanto is said to be “bending over backwards” to compensate farmers who suffered losses, but gagged them against speaking about the problems.

Monsanto’s Managing Director in Africa said, “Less than 25% of the Monsanto-seeded farms are involved in the loss,” denied the problem was caused genetic engineering, and said there had been, “... insufficient fertilisation during the seed-production process.”

Activists questioned how such a “mistake” is possible in three different varieties and have called on South African authorities to conduct an urgent investigation.

Meanwhile, in June the Constitutional Court set aside an order that the Biowatch campaign pay Monsanto’s court costs after a nine-year battle over freedom of information about GM crop plantings.

Despite Biowatch winning the case and the right to 8 of the 11 categories of information they sought, the High Court had ruled that Monsanto were “forced” to defend the case so Biowatch must pay their costs, which would have destroyed the small organisation. The new ruling was unanimous and removes the “chilling effect” on organisations acting in the public interest but fearful of huge costs awards.

Americas

US

In May the American Academy of Environmental Medicine (AAEM) called for an immediate moratorium on all GM foods saying, “... there is more than a casual association between GM foods and adverse health effects ... GM foods pose a serious health risk in the areas

“GM foods pose a serious health risk”

of toxicology, allergy and immune function, reproductive health, and metabolic, physiologic and genetic health.” The AAEM also called for implementation of immediate long-term safety testing and labelling of GM foods, as well as urging physicians to “consider the role of GM foods in their patients’ disease processes”. (The British Medical Association made a similar call in 2002.) For the full AAEM position paper, see <http://aaemonline.org/gmopost.html>.

Elsewhere a Federal Judge in Missouri issued an injunction on further planting and ruled in March that US Fish and Wildlife Service should not have permitted GM to be planted on national wildlife refuge land because it had not conducted environmental impact studies on the compatibility of GM with conservation and habitat preservation. The Judge wrote that the Service does “not contest that their own biologists determined that these activities posed significant environmental risks to Prime Hook, including biological contamination, increased weed resistance and damage to soils.” A Service spokesperson said, “We can’t disagree with the plaintiffs that we should have done a better analysis of our program.”

Argentina

Environmental lawyers petitioned the Supreme Court in May for a six-month ban on the sale of glyphosate (an active ingredient in herbicides, including Monsanto’s Roundup), citing yet another new study showing that even tiny amounts of the product harm human health. Argentina has used vast GM soya monocultures to become one of the world’s top exporters, but according to the association of fertiliser companies a ban would mean “we couldn’t do agriculture in Argentina”, with huge financial implications – tariffs on soya exports alone are around US\$5 billion this year, already half of the previous year due to ongoing clashes with wealthy land owner farmers who object to policies designed to redistribute income from agriculture through tariffs.

The scientist behind the new study concedes there are “too many economic interests at stake” to ban glyphosate outright, but that officials should at least could enforce effective controls where crops are sprayed.

Colombia

In June reports emerged that the federation of cotton growers are looking to sue Monsanto after damage to 13% of crops due to GM seed not performing as promised. The seed, which was three times more expensive than normal seed, is part of the new “Genuity” brand and supposed to withstand both bollworm and glyphosate, but instead resulted in a reported £7million loss to farmers. Monsanto’s compensation offer came with terms attached farmers are not keen to accept, especially as this incident repeats a similar problem with Monsanto seed in 2008.