

Thin Ice



the GM Freeze Campaign newsletter

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Indian Parliament: Ban GM field tests, probe conflicts of interest

In August the report of a two-year study by the 31-member Parliamentary Committee on Agriculture unanimously called on the Government to end all GM field trials and to ban GM food crops until better monitoring, oversight and surveillance mechanisms are enacted. The report said an unnamed Government Minister was among those pressuring regulators to press ahead with GM before safety had been established and confirmed conflicts of interest in the regulatory process.

The MPs called on the Government to initiate an independent investigation into how permission was granted to commercialise GM brinjal (eggplant, see TI 17, 21) when required safety testing had not been done and without addressing the 30% increase in toxic alkaloid content in the GM variety. The report called the process, "Collusion

of the worst kind from the beginning till the imposition of a moratorium on its commercialisation in February 2010."

The report criticised the Government for not discussing the introduction of GM cotton in Parliament, not properly monitoring

**India GM Report:
"The entire system
reflects a pro-
industry tilt, which
is best avoided."**

impacts on animals eating cottonseed and enacting policies that ignore 70% of small and marginal farmers:

"There have been no significant socio-economic benefits to the farmers because of introduction of Bt Cotton. On the contrary,

being a capital-intensive agriculture practice, investments of the farmers has increased manifolds, this exposing them to far greater risks due to massive debt which a vast majority of them can ill afford."

The report noted that the seed industry, not farmers, benefits from GM. The concentration of the seed industry into the hands of just a few companies means farmers have very few non-GM choices. It said that until these problems and others are addressed, GM should only be permitted under "strict containment", a demand likely to hinder progress of the proposed Biotechnology Regulatory Authority of India (BRAI) (see TI 17).

The Chair of the Committee said costs for farmers are increasing,

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GET ACTIVE

Demand proper safety testing of GM food and feed now

A new two-year feeding study has shown increased death and cancer rates in rats fed GM maize and glyphosate (the active ingredient in Monsanto's Roundup). As with many studies raising serious potential health implications for GMOs and associated chemicals, vested interests are attacking the scientist rather than investigating the science. More information can be found at:

www.gmfreeze.org/why-freeze/criigen-2012-study-long-term-health-impacts-gm-and-roundup/

Please write to your MP today demanding a halt on these crops in our food chain and for the UK to stop voting in favour of GM applications in the EU until the safety of the products is properly investigated.

INTERNATIONAL ROUNDUP

Africa

Egypt

In July reports emerged that authorities seized a shipment of Monsanto GM MON810 maize in January 2012 because it was not properly approved by the Ministry of Environment. Two Ministry advisors, both of whom were previously President of the pro-GM Agricultural Research Center, are reported to have signed import papers approving the shipment. The professor appointed as the Government GM leader said, "This is a blatant violation of both the Constitution and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety that Egypt ratified." It is alleged that a draft biosafety law was blocked by Monsanto bribing key officials. The draft law has comprehensive risk management provisions, including labels on all GMOs, close monitoring of the import process, lab tests for every new GMO shipment to Egypt and, critically, liability on developers for any environmental damage caused by their GM products. These provision would make the law far stronger than Europe's GM regulation.

Kenya

In June the CEO of the Kenya National Biosafety Authority responded to industry complaints saying new biotechnology laws, "[W]ill ensure that consumers are aware of the presence of any GMO material in foods and will also facilitate their traceability."

There are no authorised commercial releases of GM products in Kenya, but importers have raised objections to labelling requirements. The CEO of the Cereal Millers Association said very few applications to import GMOs had been lodged as importers fear violating the law. She said, "If millers confine themselves to buying only GM-free maize from farmers due to all the regulations in place, there will be no incentive to adopt or grow GM maize in Kenya, even if the latter is attractive or more competitive in the pricing." Industry objectors oppose labelling GMOS, clearly indicating even they believe there is little demand for GM products and that labelling would enable consumers to avoid them.

Americas

Argentina

In August the First Criminal Court in Cordoba convicted two farmers for spraying glyphosate on land near residential areas in violation of regulations banning the use of farm chemicals near homes. The case was brought by a community group that developed the first epidemiological survey for local residents that found much higher than normal rates of cancer, birth defects, reproductive and hormonal disorders, leukaemias and allergies. The trial confirmed medical and scientific results, as well as the presence of chemicals in the blood of children and adults. A separate judicial inquiry is considering the wider effects of agrochemicals on health.

Brazil

In August the First Regional Federal Court upheld an appeal finding Nestle in violation of the Consumer Protection Code for failing to label products containing GMOs. The ruling fined the company R\$5,000 (US\$2,478) per product found on the market in violation of the court order. Labels must include the percentage of GM present, and the ruling said, "Lower percentage does not eliminate the right to know for the consumer." In fact the Public Prosecutor found more than half of the soybeans used in an unlabelled Nestle product were GM.

The company's stance on GM information is inconsistent. In August Nestle's Corporate Head of Sustainable Agriculture said in an interview, "We [Nestle] have a very simple way of looking at GM: Listen to what the consumer wants. If they don't want it in products, you don't put it in them." Yet in addition to violating Brazil's labelling laws the company has made several donations totalling some US\$1.17 million to fight the ongoing right-to-know GM labelling ballot in California.

In September the Mato Grosso Soybean and Corn Producers Association (APROSOJA) warned farmers not to plant Monsanto's new GM soybean Intacta RR2 Pro "stacked" with herbicide and insect resistance genes. The new GM soybean is not approved in China, which imports

some two-thirds of Brazil's crop, nor is it commercialised in Brazil. APROSOJA nevertheless fears it will contaminate shipments to China and force a repeat of 2004 rejections by Chinese authorities under China's zero tolerance policy to unauthorised GMOs.

The new soybean was trialled last year, and farmers were required to destroy the crop. APROSOJA worries that Monsanto will increase the "test area" about 500 times next year, effectively commercialising the seed without legal authorisation. An APROSOJA official said, "It's like they're testing it, but with no controls," and an APROSOJA statement said, "Even with all the control and monitoring mechanisms proposed by Monsanto, we still see an enormous risk that the Intacta RR2 Pro variety of soybean seeds will be introduced on the Brazilian market."

US

In June the American Medical Association (AMA) called for mandatory premarket safety testing of GM foods to address public interests and ensure public health.

In July Archer Daniels Midland (ADM) lost money on ethanol production as US maize farmers struggled with drought. The results demonstrate that in tough times agrofuels not only divert food into cars, but also hurt the bottom line of the companies trying to make money doing it. In August the German Development Minister joined the chorus of voices calling for an immediate ban on agrofuels.

In August a Federal Jury awarded Monsanto US\$1 billion for DuPont's "wilful infringement" of Monsanto's Roundup Ready patent in soybeans. DuPont's attempts to develop its own glyphosate resistant technology failed, so it combined its gene with Monsanto's Roundup Ready gene in violation of its license with Monsanto. DuPont said, "There were several fundamental errors in the case which deprived the jury of important facts and arguments." The company has already abandoned the product in question.

Also in August Wal-Mart, which owns UK supermarket ASDA, announced it will sell Monsanto's stacked RR/Bt GM sweetcorn in the US. It will be unlabelled.

The company said the sweetcorn will help reduce insecticide use in the US. Critics say the corn has not been safety tested, and the lack of study makes it impossible to know whether it poses any health risks.

In August new tests by the University of Illinois confirmed that damage done last year to Monsanto's Bt corn fields in western Illinois was caused by rootworms that have developed resistance to the company's GM genetically modified trait. The research confirms previous findings by Iowa State University. The Illinois researcher said the dominance of Bt corn on the market leaves farmers without sufficient access to seed without the failing GM trait. Monsanto disputes both this and that resistance has been confirmed in the field, saying farmers can easily manage the problem. Last year the US EPA told Monsanto the company's existing monitoring program was "ineffective" and it wanted Monsanto to survey fields earlier as insect damage appears. In September this year the EPA reported "mounting evidence" of Monsanto's Bt corn losing effectiveness.

In September the USDA fined the University of Wyoming US\$8,500 under the Animal Welfare Act for neglecting kid goats genetically modified to produce fibres akin to spider silk in their milk.

Asia

China

In July a scientist from Nanjing Agricultural University reported that populations of cotton bollworm have more diverse genetic mutations than previously believed. This potentially complicates pest resistance problems in GM Bt cotton crops. Known mutations have been joined by "lots of other mutations", some of which occur on "completely different genes".

The findings may indicate that strategies to fight pest resistance, like planting non-GM refuges, are insufficient, since newly-identified mutations are "dominant", so would appear in all descendents and make them resistant to the GM Bt toxins. The study's Co-author Bruce Tabashnik, Head of Entomology at the University of Arizona, said, "Dominant resistance is more difficult to manage and cannot be readily slowed with refuges, which are especially useful when resistance is recessive."

Monsanto's Head of Global Insect Resistance Management (whose job title surely indicates there is a problem that needs managing) said early detection of resistance is an important goal, but that

the new study does not establish a direct relationship between newly-discovered genetic mechanisms and pests' ability to survive in fields.

India

In August the Maharashtra Government banned Mayco/Monsanto's GM Bt cottonseed with immediate effect following widespread complaints that the seed supplied is of inferior quality. The Government recognised the links between poor GM cotton performance and the farming crises in Maharashtra, including thousands of farmers to commit suicide.

Phillippines

In September a report by a farmer-led network of NGOs and scientists found GM maize has forced hundreds of thousands of smallholder farmers into debt to lenders who also sell them the more expensive GM seed. In addition to needing increased levels of expensive fertiliser and other inputs, seed costs are up 282% from introductory prices. Seed now accounts for 18-21% of a farmer's total cost of production, fertiliser around 23%, but interest payments now account for 26% of the total cost of production. Farmers also report a wide range of health problems after prolonged exposure to Bt corn including stomach pains, diarrhoea, chest pains, itching and skin allergies. The Department of Agriculture promotes the GM maize, promising lower costs and improved farm incomes, but the report found the country's GM monitoring body has not monitored the impacts of Bt corn.

Australasia

New Zealand

In August the Chair of the oilseed rape growers' group warned colleagues that experience of GM farmers overseas should convince them to avoid the crop. He was meeting with visiting Australian farmers on a speaking tour, one of whom, Bob Mackley, lost his GM-free status after his crop was contaminated by a neighbour's GM crop. Mr Mackley also warned New Zealand farmers that adopting GM is a "one-way trip" and coexistence claims "untrue", saying, "If New Zealand does go down the GE path it is absolutely critical that the responsibility for non-GE farmers' losses must be squarely on the shoulders of the owners of the patents." Mr Mackley said, "There are better ways to farm...The money put into GE research would be better spent put into research on soil."

Europe

In June EFSA issued a Scientific Opinion clearing the way for a vote on the first cultivation of a GM soybean in the EU. A new legal dossier, written by EU legal expert Professor Dr Ludwig Kraemer, alleges authorising the crop for cultivation would violate EU law because EFSA has not included increased glyphosate residues or their cumulative effects when assessing Monsanto's application. The dossier also says the EU's failure to monitor impacts of approved GM crops on human health violates EU law, and that previous authorisations for imports of GM food and feed suffer from the same deficiencies so must be re-opened.

In August the European Network of Scientists for Social Responsibility filed a complaint against the EC's import authorisation of Monsanto's new soybean Intacta (see Brazil above). Citing the Kraemer dossier the complaint says EFSA has not carried out required risk assessments, or only carried out simplified superficial studies, in violation of EU regulations stating GM plants should only be authorised after scientific evaluation of the highest standard. A spokesperson said, "The data analysis of risk assessment as performed by EFSA shows that crucial points, such as allergenic risks and combinatorial effects, were not taken into account sufficiently. In result this causes a high level of risks for the consumers."

Italy

The farmer prosecuted for planting GM maize without additional national authorisation (see TI 26) was vindicated when the European Court of Justice ruled in September, "The cultivation of genetically modified organisms such as the MON810 maize varieties cannot be made subject to a national authorisation procedure when the use and marketing of those varieties are authorised." The ruling means EU Member States cannot use a lack of coexistence regulations to ban use of GM seed authorised at EU level.

Switzerland

In September the Swiss National Science Foundation's National Research Programme on the risks and benefits of GM plants in agriculture reported that the economic benefits of GM technology for farmers remain "modest". Farmer Bernard Nicod, a member of the Executive Committee of the Swiss Farmers' Association, said, "I am not opposed in

INTERNATIONAL ROUNDUP

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principle to genetic engineering. Most of the farmers, at least those who belong to our Association, share this view. We just think that Swiss agriculture is not ready for it yet... Production of GM plants needs to meet three conditions: it has to make sense from an ecological, an agricultural and an economic point of view. Currently, none of these criteria hold... the majority of our consumers do not want foods produced from transgenic crops. No business person would want to get into producing goods that the consumer doesn't want."

Ireland

In July food, restaurant, and tourism representatives criticised the EPA for putting the country's "clean, green" agricultural image at risk by permitting a field trial of GM potatoes over the next two years in County Carlow.

Supporters of the GM potatoes claim they will reduce the application of chemical fungicides. Chef Darina Allen, a member of Slow Food Ireland, the European Chef's Association, Eurotoques, and the Taste Council, saying, "The consequential risk for Ireland's food business is much greater than any potential benefits in reducing crop costs. Huge investments have been made in building the island's reputation as a green, clean, good-food island... This strategic benefit is being devalued and undermined by policies that pander to the owners of unproven, patented technologies that can cause unforeseen consequences to the environment and Ireland's future as a pristine producer."

Other critics included John McKenna, publisher of the Bridgestone guides, who said, "What makes the food culture in Ireland special is its purity and distinctiveness. With GM foods there is no distinctiveness, no difference between a potato grown in Tipperary or Down or Iowa. I think that we have seen from the worldwide growing of GM foods that everything it promised has failed to come true." The Organic Trust urged Teagasc to scrap the trial saying, "Ireland cannot run with the hare and hunt with the hound when it comes to our reputation as a food exporter."

Pierre Patriat, Director the Association of Seed Producers of Mato Grosso:

"So we are running the certain risk that tomorrow, for instance in Mato Grosso, we will not have 40 seed multipliers any longer, but perhaps only ten suppliers ... This has a direct influence on the sovereignty, on the production autonomy, of the country.

"Why? Because this way production is concentrated in the hands of a few people and many jobs are inevitably abolished. And most importantly, it will deprive the farmer of the possibility to negotiate seed prices. Without sufficient competition prices cannot be beaten down and the price will always be determined by the suppliers.

"This is an extremely serious issue as we are cartel-izing the market.

"In principle we are not opposed to agro-biotechnology. Everyone should be able to offer their technology on the market. What concerns us is that the big biotech players are the same companies that also offer us agrochemicals. That is a disastrous combination – one more creation of a monopoly! Now these companies are pushing more and more into the fertilizer market. They all move closer to the big agro-trading companies.

"This means that in the future farmers will be reduced simply to a fictitious form of independence while nevertheless bearing all the risks alone: weather changes, employer risks, as well as the entire ecological responsibility, for minimal compensation."

Indian Parliament: Ban GM field tests ...

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not decreasing, using GM and recognised the connection to suicides that result from the debts incurred. He said, "In India, where 82% of the agriculture industry is of small farmers and where there is huge biodiversity, we should not go for GM foods. Even if we take the argument that we have to increase our food production according to the demands, we should look into indigenous ways to enhance it."

The Coalition for GM-free India welcomed the report, demanding the immediate halt of all GM field trials and that the BRAI proposals be torn up, saying, "It is clear that the Government's views are uninformed and biased on the matter, and the blind promotion of the technology is unscientific to say the least."

Mayco/Monsanto said it would wait to be contacted by the Government before responding.

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.

GM Freeze Campaign, 50 South Yorkshire Buildings, Silkstone Common, Barnsley S75 4RJ. Tel: 0845 217 8992 Email: info@gmfreeze.org

www.gmfreeze.org