

# Thin Ice



the GM Freeze Campaign newsletter

Issue 28, January 2013

## CRIIGEN rat study: Not over yet

In September and October Russia and Kazakhstan banned Monsanto's NK603, the maize used in the CRIIGEN study.

In October former French Environment Minister Corinne Lepage MEP wrote an article accusing EFSA of a "serious ethical breach", saying conflicts of interest lead the agency to attempt to discredit the CRIIGEN study in order to avoid having to explain its approval of the GMO (and others). She adds, "The organisation of EFSA's responsibilities must be totally reviewed," and concludes by calling for the resignation of EFSA's Executive Director.

By November five former French Environment Ministers or Secretaries of State (cross party) were calling for revision of European GM authorisation procedures. Chantal Jouanno, Secretary of State in 2009/10 said, "We're not going to succumb to pressures from industry."

## Farmers lead US GM backlash – UK Government lags behind

In December a petition signed by 40,000 farmers was delivered to Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack, a former Monsanto lawyer, demanding an immediate halt on approvals of next generation GM crops, including Dow's controversial 2,4-D tolerant maize and dicamba tolerant crops. A former Obama policy advisor said, "The whole suite of new GE seeds is a bad idea for farmers and farm communities." Citing mounting agronomic and health risks one farmer said, "History has proven time and again that herbicide-based weed management will inevitably fail."

Meanwhile UK Secretary of State Owen Paterson urged us to eat and grow more GM, saying GM has "real environmental benefits". Supportive press coverage claimed polls show public concern about GM is decreasing, contradicting several existing polls showing increased public concern. An

FSA study published in January showed two thirds of people want all uses of GM products in food to be labelled, including meat, milk and eggs from animals fed GM.

The UK Government position is therefore out of touch with both UK public demand and US farmers with experience growing GM. In a response to a formal question the Scottish Government said, "The Scottish Government maintains a precautionary approach to the production of GM food and will continue to defend the integrity of our own food and drink sector by continuing to oppose the cultivation of GM crops in Scotland." The Welsh Government also opposes GM for similar reasons.

How the UK Government arrives at its consistently pro-GM voting position at EU level continues to be unclear, as does the National Farmers Union (NFU) continued support for the crops.

### GET ACTIVE

## Tell the FDA 'NO' to GM salmon

Just before Christmas the US FDA took the last step toward approving GM salmon as food using "safety" data submitted by AquaBounty – the company applying to sell GM salmon.

Please send your objections BEFORE 25 February to the FDA's public consultation at: [www.regulations.gov/#!documentDetail;D=FDA-2011-N-0899-0001](http://www.regulations.gov/#!documentDetail;D=FDA-2011-N-0899-0001) ensuring that you quote "Docket No. FDA-2011-N-0899". Further details and postal contacts available at our website.

# INTERNATIONAL ROUNDUP

## Africa

In November 400 organisations representing small-scale farmers, NGOs, consumers, businesses and others called on the African Union to discuss a complete ban on GMOs saying the technology has failed to deliver on 16 years of promises. La Via Campesina member and Chair of the East and Southern African Farmers group said, “Corporate-owned, GM seed won’t solve any of our problems. We have our own varieties, we have our own knowledge. We need to be supported so that we can flourish in the agricultural systems that are our heritage.”

## Kenya

In November the Government banned all GM imports, and the Public Health Minister directed all port authorities to ensure the ban is upheld. She said, “The protection of the consumer and assurance to the public on the safety of food is extremely important in making decisions about food importation, distribution and consumption. Where there is apprehension and uncertainty with regard to the safety of food products, precautionary measures to protect the health of the people must be undertaken.”

## Tanzania

In November the Government passed the Plant Breeders’ Rights Act saying it is “not ready” to permit GM. Citing the threat that multinational corporations would use GM seeds to undermine traditional varieties, the Minister for Agriculture said, “For a GMO to be introduced in the country there are strict liabilities attached under the Environmental Management Act, 2004, therefore there is no need to panic because we are all patriotic and we would not like to put the future of our country in doubt ... The Government is committed in preserving local seeds and we will not let them be replaced by foreign seeds.”

## Americas

### Argentina

In October Monsanto and Bunge were suspended from the National Cereals Register for unpaid taxes. [see TI 21] Investigations continue into Cargill and mining companies, with authorities saying four of the country’s 10 biggest exporters and cereals and soybean processors underpaid tax owed.

### Bolivia

In October President Morales enacted the Law of Mother Earth and Integral Development to Live Well. The law enshrines 11 rights, including the rights to biodiversity, uncontaminated water and air, freedom from overdevelopment and freedom from GM crops.

### Canada

In October NFU branches organised a protest outside a Canadian Seed Trade Association workshop discussing a framework for “coexistence” of GM and non-GM alfalfa. The President of NFU in Grey County said, “The CSTA’s claim that it can prevent GM alfalfa from contaminating non-GM alfalfa crops is utterly absurd.” Replying to suggestions that GM alfalfa would not spread GM pollen because it would be harvested before non-GM crops, the Coordinator of NFU Region 3 said, “Tell that to the bees. They do not know the difference, and have not signed any coexistence plan... Our experience with GM ‘Triffid’ flax shows how quickly export markets can be shut down due to contamination and how pernicious contamination can be.” [see TI 19]

### Mexico

In November the Government postponed approving GM maize for cultivation in order to set safety regulations, including identifying maize centres of origin so GM can be banned in them. The Union

of Scientists Committed to Society demanded a halt to “any application” for release of GM corn in Mexico and a “thorough, transparent and publicly acceptable review” of GM corn lines and their alternatives.

### Peru

In November the Government enacted a 10-year moratorium on GM production. The Environment Minister called the move a “demonstration of the Government’s commitment to preserve the biodiversity of native crops”. The President of the Council of Ministers said, “This confirms the importance this government attaches to biological diversity, to native crops and to the *campesinos* of Peru.”

### US

In October a paper published in *Molecular Ecology* demonstrated that escaped experimental Scotts Company GM bentgrass has now outcrossed with wild grass plants and created a feral population of hybrid GM grass. [see TI 21]

November was a busy month in the US. Kaiser Permanente (the largest managed healthcare provider in the country) offered advice on avoiding GMOs saying, “GMOs have been added to our food supply since 1994, but most people don’t know it because the US does not require labeling... Despite what the biotech industry might say, there is little research on the long-term effects of GMOs on human health.” The Council for Responsible Genetics reiterated its support for GM labelling saying it is, “[I]n fundamental disagreement with the recent statement from the American Association for the Advancement of Science in which it offered assurances that GMOs are safe and that therefore labelling of foods containing GM ingredients is unnecessary... The truth is we do not know conclusively what the long-term effects of growing and consuming GM crops will be... Yet we know enough to

**“[GM] means shame, hunger, dependence and illness for human beings, and for the nature and biodiversity that we constantly sell [to tourists] in Costa Rica ... We’re talking about the future of farmers’ rights, and that can’t be defined by a closed-door Commission.”**

**Juan Arriaga, farmer and member of Sol y Vida, on the request by Monsanto subsidiary Delta & Pine to plant GM maize being discussed by the National Biosecurity Technical Commission in November.**

have valid concerns. The plant genome is not like a Lego set; it is more like an ecosystem... The fact that no deaths have been attributed to GM crops does not mean they are safe... Before we reach any conclusions with regard to GM foods, they must be studied. That's a basic scientific principle that the AAAS Board appears to have circumvented with their statement."

Lab testing showed that rootworms appear to be developing resistance to all Bt maize varieties, indicating that the crops may be susceptible to damage by pests no longer killed by Monsanto's GM Bt maize. A University of Nebraska entomology professor told a conference such cross-resistance may be in fields already, and a USDA spokesperson said resistance in fields is "almost certainly possible for every Bt product that is out there".

A Louisiana State University study showed that armyworms (moth larvae that attack foliage) are now showing signs of resistance to the Dow/DuPont GM maize. A Dow spokesperson said armyworm resistance "would seem to have little agronomic significance for US growers operating north of Tampa". Resistant armyworms discovered in Puerto Rico forced the company to withdraw the products from sale.

The US Justice Department closed its antitrust investigation into corporate concentration in agriculture without any charges or major regulatory changes. [see TI 17] A spokesperson for the Justice Department said the decision reflected "marketplace developments that occurred during the pendency of the investigation". The head of the Justice Department's antitrust enforcement at the time the case was launched is now working in the private sector.

Finally the White House has announced it will not end mandatory use of maize in agofuels, which is believed to be a significant cause of record high food prices.

## Australasia

### China

In December a Sichuan University study showed that transgenic DNA containing antibiotic resistance markers was found in all six rivers tested. The origin(s) of the GM DNA is not identified. The findings are a serious concern for antibiotic resistance in human and veterinary medicine, which the paper says "poses a significant challenge to human health, and its rate continues to rise globally", adding, "[S]ynthetic

plasmid vectors may represent a source of antibiotic resistance in humans."

### Australia

In December South Australia's Agriculture Minister declined a request from the Federal Government to review the State's ban on GM crops, saying, "South Australia's clean, green food bowl gives us a competitive edge in the market. Our non-GM crops attract greater market prices, and the exceptional quality of SA's food bowl is synonymous with the state. We will not be doing anything to jeopardise this." GM oilseed rape (OSR) has fallen to 7% of the country's seed sales, and the crop is selling at up to AU\$30/tonne less than non-GM. A broking manager for AgFarm said non-GM OSR gets a higher price because "it speaks all languages and can go anywhere".

### India

In October the Parliamentary Committee on Agriculture, a panel of expert appointed by the Supreme Court, recommended a 10-year moratorium on all GM trials saying, "Ten years is a reasonable length of time for restructuring." In November many of the country's biggest farmers' unions wrote to the Supreme Court supporting all of the Panel's recommendations. The South Indian Coordination Committee of Farmer Movements said, "We believe that transgenics will affect our diversity and that this is an unneeded, hazardous technology," and urged the Court "to immediately pass all appropriate orders" to enact the Panel's recommendations. One Union spokesperson said, "It is apparent that statutory Rules, biosafety norms and simple federal policy are repeatedly being defied," and another said, "We are concerned that the multinational and big Indian seed companies and their lobbies are pressurising the Indian Government and research institutions, and spreading wrong information to push the GM crops even when their safety is under question."

In November the Maharashtra Department of Agriculture announced Bt cotton has failed for the third year running, with yields down nearly 40%. Crop losses last year were blamed on drought, but this year's failures also occurred in areas with adequate irrigation. Accumulated losses to farmers in Maharashtra alone are likely to be more than £1.75 billion. Maharashtra has the highest suicide rate in India, and authorities expect more than 5,000 deaths this year (comparison to the 3,500 last year despite 4-5 million farmers receiving

compensation). A spokesperson for a farmers' group said, "We hope the state relief packages actually help farmers this time instead of just benefiting contractors, politicians and multinational agromajors like it has in the past."

### Pakistan

In October negotiations between Punjab authorities and Monsanto attempting to bring Bollgard into the country stalled when the company insisted that the Government should pay between US\$12-15/acre if farmers save and exchange its patented seed, as they have done for centuries, instead of buying new seed from the company's authorised dealers.

### Japan

In November plants containing Monsanto's and Bayer's GM OSR traits, including wild OSR relatives, were found growing along more than 15 kilometres of roadside leading from Yokkaichi port. Japan is the world's biggest OSR importer, but local people complain the Government has not taken any measures to eliminate the contamination problem. Japan's Consumers Union confirms that GM OSR has been found in many locations, mainly near harbours and along neighbouring roads leading to food oil factories.

## Europe

In November the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development was reported to be preparing to offer Monsanto US\$40 million in a bailout designed to cover contracts that buyers can no longer afford to honour in Bulgaria, Russia, Serbia, Turkey, Ukraine and Hungary. Protests against approving the deal were lodged by 157 NGOs.

### Finland

In October a study by Aalto University published in *Science of the Total Environment* showed that halving current food waste would feed 1 billion people. The study found that food waste also wastes of 4.3 kilograms of fertilizers/year and 614 kilocalories/day for every person in the world.

### Netherlands

In December the Advertising Code Commission upheld a complaint about a Roundup ad (published in June 2012) saying it made "a number of misleading claims" about the chemical's persistence, impact and mobility in the soil. Monsanto has faced similar reprimands over its advertising in France, the UK, India, Brazil and South Africa.



# INTERNATIONAL ROUNDUP

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## Norway

In December the Government banned imports of Monsanto's GM OSR GT73 saying it poses risks to wild relatives and is "not beneficial to society".

## Poland

In January the Government banned cultivation of both MON810 maize and Amflora potato (the only two crops authorised in the EU).

## Russia

In December the Agriculture Minister announced his intention to introduce restrictions on both imports and cultivation of GMOs, saying his "preliminary view" is that Russia's feed and livestock industries don't need GM. Russia's GM cultivation ban has been an issue with the US in negotiations on WTO membership. The Honorary President of the National Association for Genetic Security said farmers he meets are strongly opposed to GMOs, saying, "They are offered seeds that come in a package with technologies and chemicals... It looks like a purposeful destruction of our varieties and breeds and their replacement with imports."

## UK

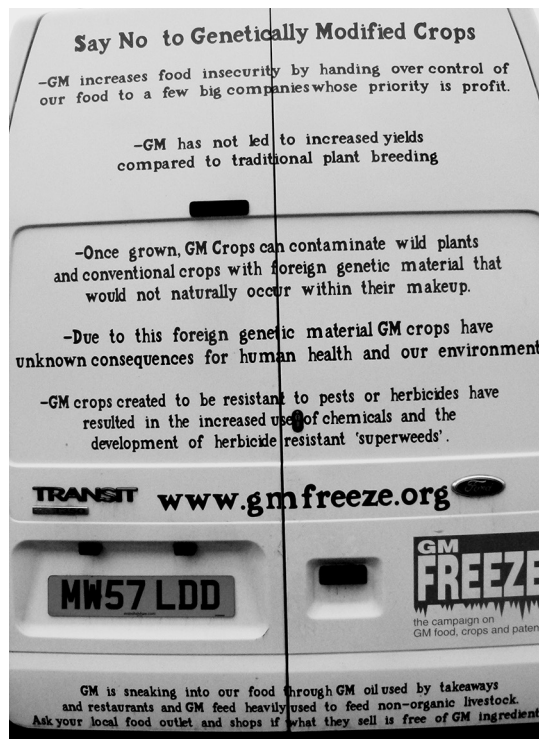
In November GeneWatch UK warned that GM companies are using the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Science and Technology in Agriculture to lobby on behalf of their business interests. Director Dr Helen Wallace said, "Lobbyists from the GM industry have infiltrated Parliament and are promoting GM crops to Government as a way to 'feed the world'... This is a carefully co-ordinated push to grow GM crops commercially in Britain and put GM foods back on supermarket shelves, but the GM industry's claims are totally disconnected from reality."

Also in November the pro-GM Crop Protection Association announced its new CEO will be Nick von Westenholz, a lawyer and currently NFU Head of Government Affairs. Westenholz said, "The CPA plays a crucial role in communicating clearly with the public, media and policymakers about the importance of plant science and crop protection."

## Dr Richard Jackson MD MPH, 30 October:

"Studies on short- or long-term health effects [of GMOs] are hard to find since the FDA does not require them for market approval. The health effects of genetically engineered foods are still unclear... One recent small study with rats in France that had a controversial finding is not sufficient evidence and should not change any voter's opinion. But given the longstanding and repeated patterns of false reassurances in environmental health, it is only fair and prudent for people to be skeptical of safety claims..."

"While I was director of the CDC's [Center for Disease Control's] National Center for Environmental Health, I instituted the Federal effort to 'biomonitor' chemical levels in the US population because I knew that as scientists we could not conduct studies on the health effects from activities or substances unless we had information about how people came into contact with them. Right now, without proper labelling, we do not know if genetically engineered ingredients are in our food, and we have no way to make informed decision about what we are feeding our families. We have a right to know what's in our food."



*What a way to go – Big Thank You to Moss Brook Growers for sending photos of the new livery for their van. What better way to spend time at a red light than reading up on the reasons to question GMOs ...*

## 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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