

Thin Ice



the GM Freeze Campaign newsletter

Issue 29, April 2013

Non-GM market gains ground, UK falls behind

In February Portugal's Intermarché Group announced it would completely withdraw all GM vegetable oil from sale by the beginning of March 2013 in its Mosqueteiros hypermarkets after an oil sold in the shops was exposed as containing GM. The oil was properly labelled but contravened the company's "no GM" policy, and the speed with which the products were removed from shelves shows how swiftly such action can be taken.

In March Germany's biggest brewer announced it will begin using the Government-backed "Ohne GenTechnik" ("without GM") labelling scheme. A few days later UK-based CertID Europe, a leading certifier of non-GM products, announced it is now authorised by the

authorities managing the label to audit and certify products under the scheme. This opens the door for UK exporters to tap into the lucrative market for non-GM labelled foods in Germany as well as to sell labelled non-GM products in the UK.

The growing "Ohne GenTechnik" scheme, launched in 2008, now has 163 members and licensees, with collective sales of more than £5.5 billion, including meat, dairy and egg producers who don't use GM feed. Scheme General Manager Alexander Hissting said, "The 'Ohne GenTechnik' seal is welcomed and trusted by more and more German consumers. We are pleased by the prospect that quality British food will also be available with 'Ohne GenTechnik' labelling in Germany in the near future, and that British consumers will also be

able to make a clear choice against GMOs in agriculture and food production with their daily food purchase."

As the Food Standards Agency's own research shows two-thirds of UK shoppers want labels to help them see all GM use in food [see TI 28], and since non-GM labels show such promise for the companies adopting them, it is difficult to see why the UK Government does not honour the Conservative manifesto commitment "ensure that consumers have the right to choose non-GM foods through clear labelling".

Instead Defra Secretary of State Owen Paterson continues to appear confused about the status of GM foods in the EU. His comment in February

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GET ACTIVE

UK supermarkets dump non-GM feed

In April many UK supermarkets abandoned long-standing policies on GM animal feed. The move, allegedly due to difficulty sourcing non-GM feed, flies in the face of the UK Government's own data showing consumers want GM out of the food chain entirely, as well as our GfK/NOP poll showing shoppers are willing to pay more to avoid GM.

It is very disappointing that both Marks & Spencer and the Co-op are among the companies making this change.

Non-GM supplies are available. Major European supermarket chains, including Carrefour, have successful labelled lines of non-GM fed animal products. China's announcement that it is moving to secure non-GM soya imports, which came after UK supermarkets claimed non-GM is not available, proves that large quantities of non-GM are on the market. If UK supermarkets place orders for non-

GM soya normal market forces of supply and demand will ensure more non-GM is grown and sold.

There is no satisfactory explanation for the change in feed policy by UK supermarkets, and companies' reliance on the widely rejected work of the ISAAA (see our many press releases on this subject and Africa below) is totally inadequate justification for rejecting consumer demands.

ACT NOW: Please write to as many supermarkets as you can, or the Co-op and Marks & Spencer if you have limited time, expressing your serious dismay at this move away from non-GM animal feed. Further details and supermarket contact information are available at www.gmfreeze.org or from us directly (see back page for contacts). Join our free action and info list for updates by contacting info@gmfreeze.org.

INTERNATIONAL ROUNDUP

Africa

Egypt

Controversy continues over whether, or how much, GM cultivation has taken place. [see TI 27] The release of the annual report of the International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-Biotech Applications (ISAAA) claimed Egypt grew 1,000 hectares of GM maize in 2012, making it the Africa's third largest GM grower. Yet the Agriculture Ministry insists it destroyed incoming illegal GM shipments last July. Local campaigners are demanding the Government clarify the discrepancy and publish a formal contradiction of the ISAAA report.

South Africa

The Africa Centre for Biosafety called the ISAAA report noted above "mischievous and erroneous". ACB's Director said, "The ISAAA, in its desperate attempt to bolster the popularity of GM crops in the media, has overestimated the spread of GM crops in SA by a staggering 400%!"

Americas

Brazil

In February the Supreme Court confirmed that Monsanto does not have the right to collect royalties on RR1 soyabean sales since the patent expired in 2010. Monsanto suspended royalty collection and said it will appeal the ruling. The original 2012 judgement also ordered Monsanto to repay illegally collected royalties paid after the patent expired. An attorney representing farmers associations says claims could reach £5.3 billion. Monsanto offered farmers a contract waiving RR1 soya royalties for two years if the farmers gave up their patent dispute and agree to pay royalties on future varieties. The Head of the Brazilian National Agriculture Federation, a group of farming associations, said, "We reject the individual contracts offered by Monsanto." The head of the soyabean growers association said, "We believe producers are being tricked into signing a contract that will get them trapped to Monsanto for every new technology."

US

In January a survey conducted by Stratus Agri-Marketing showed 49% of all US farmers now have glyphosate resistant weeds on their land, with superweeds infesting a total area of 61.2 million acres (an area nearly 12 times the size of Wales). The survey also shows the spread of superweeds is accelerating, up 25% in 2011 and then 51% in 2012, with resistant acreage almost doubling in Nebraska, Iowa and Indiana between 2011/12. The problem is also intensifying as more weed species develop resistance. Resistance rates in Southern states, like Georgia, are reported to top 92% of growers reporting glyphosate-resistant weeds.

In January the EPA confirmed resistant rootworm in Bt maize in Illinois and Iowa, and the Agency says four more states may be affected. While the problem has been known for some time [see TI 23, 26] it is noteworthy that the EPA now says it is using the resistance test developed by Iowa State University because the methods previously used are "flawed". A Monsanto spokesperson said, "Corn rootworm resistance is suspected, but not confirmed, according to the regulatory definition of resistance." The EPA says it will convene an advisory panel to update its resistance identification procedures. A spokesperson for DuPont Pioneer is reported to have advised farmers with rootworm resistance to "throw the kitchen sink" at the problem, but admitted the overreliance on insecticides could lead

to increased resistance and diminishing control options.

In February a University of Wisconsin study showed some GM maize varieties, including both Roundup Ready and the Bt trait for rootworm, had lower yields than conventional counterparts. The team analysed yield data from two decades of cultivation of 500 maize hybrids, including GMOs when they came on the market, and confirmed that while GM may help reduce damage in bad years, it does not increase average yield in good years. Yields from Bt designed to resist rootworm had a yield drag of 12 bushels/acre over conventional hybrids.

The corn agronomist who lead the study said, "For the first time we have an estimate of what GM hybrids mean as far as value for the farmer...A lot of farmers assume that if it's transgenic, it's great in terms of yield, but we know that putting a transgene into a corn hybrid isn't always successful. You don't want to pay \$75 dollars more per bag of seed to produce 12 bushels less per acre."

Australasia

India

In January the High Court confirmed a previous order that Bayer must compensate farmers for heavy losses due to "inferior" Bt cottonseed supplied in 2010. Bayer announced it is "reviewing the High Court order and in the process of exploring various legal options", adding that "harsh climatic conditions, such

"One factor is that Roundup isn't perfect anymore. Another is that at least one corn rootworm trait isn't as effective as it was. Some guys are saying, 'Okay, if Roundup doesn't do it alone, and I have to use insecticide, why plant US\$350/bag seed?'"

Mac Ehrhardt of Albert Lea Seed in Minnesota on the increased demand for non-GM seed

"For 2014 planting Syngenta will offer a limited supply of one conventional hybrid with Agrisure Artesian technology to the central and eastern Corn Belt."

Duane Martin of Syngenta on availability of non-GM seed

as excess and continuous rainfall, and also poor crop management by smaller farmers” caused the problems.

New Zealand

An undated web page posted by the Ministry for Primary Industries announced New Zealand has become the first country to sign a trade agreement with the US “in which each country recognises that each has food safety systems as providing a comparable degree of food safety assurance”. A Ministry representative said the agreement will lessen the potential regulatory burden for foods traded between the countries. The completion of the agreement raises concern that a precedent has been set in advance of the heralded US/EU trade negotiations expected to launch soon. The US is pressing hard for an end to EU food regulations it considers too burdensome, including on GMOs.

Europe

In January the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development dropped its controversial US\$40 million “risk-sharing facility” with Monsanto designed to expand GM cultivation while protecting the company from any financial losses if the contracts could not be paid by receiving countries. [see TI 28] The EBRD said, “[I]n this particular transaction, the EBRD and Monsanto were unable to find a satisfactory project structure for financing,” but noted that both parties will continue to look for a suitable project.

In January BASF withdrew its applications for EU approval of its three GM potatoes.

In February the Commission’s Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health voted to require mandatory toxicology studies for single event GM crops. Serious limitations with the decision include that it only requires 90-day tests, which may be insufficient to reveal problems arising from long-term low-dose exposure. The new law also permits the industry to use derogations that effectively allow companies to choose not to fulfil some requirements if they decide those elements are unnecessary. Furthermore it appears that none of the toxicity testing will be required for GMOs already under consideration for EU authorisation.

In a new development to the CRIIGEN rat study controversy [see TI 28] Monsanto announced in March it may sue EFSA for releasing the data the company provided with its authorisation application for its GM maize NK603. French MEP Corinne Lepage, a former Minister of Ecology, compared Monsanto’s pursuit of secrecy to an omerta (Mafia code of silence) saying, “This transparency on the raw data is not only legitimate but also perfectly legal, since [European law] precludes confidentiality of studies relating to the impact on health and the environment of GMOs. This desire for transparency on the part of EFSA is a step in the right direction, and I encourage EFSA and Europe to require that all data and studies [supporting] the placing on the market of GMOs are made public.”

In March Monsanto applied for authorisation to import its cotton MON88701, the first stacked GM resistant to glufosinate and dicamba.

GM salmon update

In January a report published by the Norwegian Development Fund questioned the motivation for developing the GM fish. An advisor to the Fund said, “Here once again we have the GM industry proclaiming it is going to save the world, this time with a luxury product, salmon, of all things. In fact this salmon is a textbook example of why genetic modification is a dead end investment if you really want to feed the world.”

In March several US supermarket chains, with a total of 2,000 shops across the country, pledged not to sell GM salmon if it is approved by the FDA as anticipated. Lawmakers in Oregon are debating a bill to ban GM salmon. Representative Paul Holvey, who is sponsoring several bills on GM labelling and GM salmon, said, “Our fisheries are extremely important to the economy,” Holvey said. “If we allow the Pacific Northwest to become a mixed bag of Atlantic salmon and genetically engineered salmon, I think consumer confidence in Pacific salmon will be undermined and damage the industry.”

Authorisation news

In January US approval of Dow AgroSciences’ new GM maize, resistant to both 2,4-D and glyphosate to replace Monsanto’s Roundup Ready varieties, was delayed for at least a year after the USDA received over 450,000 objections to introducing 2,4-D systems. The Pesticide Action Network said, “Weed resistance to chemical herbicides is one of the biggest problems farmers now face, and that is a direct result of converting so much of our farmland to herbicide resistant crops. We need to get out of this futile chemical arms race fast.” Dow said its product is needed soon to combat glyphosate resistant weeds.

In March Bayer and Syngenta applied for US approval of a new soya variety resistant to three herbicides, including glufosinate-ammonium. A spokesperson for Bayer CropScience said, “This new trait and herbicide system will enable growers to build highly effective weed management programs in soybeans while utilizing rotation of multiple and highly effective herbicide modes of action – critical in the ongoing fight against weed resistance.”

Non-GM market gains ground

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that countries should be able to choose independently of the EU to sell and grow GM begs a question as to how safety assessments and authorisation would be conducted if the UK decided to “go it alone”. Proposing such a breach of the Single Market suggests Mr Paterson believes GM has more to offer the UK than all of our trade with Europe, but the vast majority of existing GM crops are soya and maize unsuitable for cultivation in the UK. Given the clear rejection by UK consumers of GM foods and the growing demand for labels to identify meat, milk and eggs from animals reared on GM,

Mr Paterson would do well to recognise that forcing GM onto an unwilling UK electorate is unlikely to be a vote winner.

The UK now has clear demand for non-GM labels and a leading certifier of non-GM products able and willing to apply an existing successful labelling scheme. Perhaps its time for Whitehall and supermarkets to stop making excuses and acknowledge that offering a clear non-GM choice in shops, including meat, milk and eggs from animals reared on non-GM feed, is a commercial priority

“Conclusion – Our discussion of the discourse surrounding genetic modification of food during the global food crisis of 2007–08 suggests that, while the crisis was real, the purported agribiotechnology solution was a figment of opportunistic spin.

“While the crisis led to very minor change in biotech food-supply chains, mainly affecting treats consumed by industrialised Asian countries, there was a surge in media coverage and commentary about the potential role of biotechnology to solve the food crisis.

“Biotechnology advocates used media platforms to conflate acute and chronic food shortages and generate publicity for specific transgenic technologies that had only distant or long-term connections to ways of resolving the immediate crisis.”

Glenn Davis Stone, Professor of Anthropology and Environmental Studies, Washington University in St. Louis and Dominic Glover, Postdoctoral Fellow in Technology and Agrarian Development at Wageningen University, “Genetically modified crops and the food crisis: discourse and material impacts”, *Development in Practice*, Volume 21, Numbers 4–5, June 2011

US states press for GM labels

In March a poll conducted by HuffPost/YouGov showed 82% of US adults think GM foods should be labelled. The poll showed the demand for labels crosses political divides.

Since the failure of Proposition 37 in favour of GM labelling in California last year, widely attributed to the biotech and food industries spending millions to defeat the ballot, some 22 US states have initiated moves to introduce labels on GM foods. In February Hawaii a “right to know” Bill passed from the Committee on Agriculture to the state Senate for a vote, but critics were disappointed by an amendment exempting local producers from labelling requirements (nearly three quarters of Hawaii’s papaya crop is GM, and the islands have hosted some 2,230 GM field trials). Three days later Vermont’s Agriculture Committee passed another labelling Bill. Other initiatives are close behind, and industry is unlikely to be able to pour as much cash into each of them as it did in California.

Big business may finally be catching up with the economics of selling GM to consumers. Ben & Jerry’s ice cream, stung by criticism its parent company Unilever paid to defeat Proposition 37, said it will remove all GMOs from its products by the end of 2013 and is now actively supporting the labelling drive. Whole Foods Market, with nearly US\$12 billion in 2012 sales, announced in March that by 2018 it will require

labels on all GM products sold in the US. A company spokesperson said, “We’re really drawing the line on labelling. It’s about the consumer’s right to know,” but the move prompted critics to demand the labelling horizon be much nearer. As noted by the Director of Public Affairs at PCC Natural Markets in Seattle, Washington (another state deliberating a GM labelling Bill), “It’s a bigger issue than just the right to know. It reaches deep into our state’s economy because of the impact this is going to have on international trade.”

Even states in which labelling initiatives have faltered are not taking “no” for an answer. New Mexico’s Bill failed in February due to a technical procedural error, but the Senator who proposed it said he expects the discussion to continue, including at national level. In February Connecticut Senators said they are redrafting a Bill that was withdrawn in 2012 for fear of legal proceedings by Monsanto.

This upswell of political demand for GM labels has led to suggestions that a nation-wide labelling scheme may be on the cards. The New York Times reported that a meeting in January attended by food giants including Wal-Mart, PepsiCo and ConAgra discussed pressing the US FDA for a national option, a move that might help interstate trade avoid having to comply with dozens of different state requirements.

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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