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GMO (In)Digest

Issue 9 of the GMO Campaign Newsletter

EU Work:

New seed regulation: Commission plans would threaten seed diversity

The European Commission presented its [food safety package](#) on 6th May, with proposals for new EU rules in a number of areas, including seed and plant reproductive products. Even though a few last-minute alterations were made to the proposal (home gardeners are now permitted to swap and save unapproved seeds, individuals and small organisations (less than 10 employees) can grow and supply/sell unapproved vegetable seed, seedbanks can also grow unapproved seed), the package's main focus is still to raise the productivity and to intensify an industrialised, export-oriented agriculture, at the expense of promoting biodiversity. The Greens/EFA group [is concerned](#) that this proposal on seeds will play into the hands of the agro-chemical industry and thus threaten seed diversity in Europe. Green MEP and co-chair of the European Parliament's agriculture committee José Bové said: "*The plans play directly into the hands of larger corporations that prioritise mass-production of monoculture seed varieties, at the expense of diversity. The Commission is supporting these businesses to market their products on the global market as an all-in-one, together with the fertilisers and pesticides they also produce*". Even though the proposal does not deal directly with GMOs, it will undoubtedly favour their market extension, as the prime beneficiaries of the new seed regulation are those biggest companies that market GMOs. The new rules may enter in force by 2016, if approved by the EP and the Council. See our blog post: <http://eat-better.greens-efa.eu/plant-it-and-make-it-grow-9791.html>

EU-US free trade agreement: EP unwilling to protect EU from GMOs

On 23rd May, the European Parliament adopted [a resolution](#) endorsing negotiations on an EU-US free trade agreement, coined the transatlantic trade and investment partnership (TTIP) with a large majority (460 votes in favour, 105 against, 28 abstentions). The Greens/EFA group [has opposed the resolution](#), because the agreement poses a real threat to core EU standards and rules, especially with regards to the protection of the cultural sector, public services, intellectual property, data protection, food safety, GMOs, geographical indications, health and environmental standards. The mandate to negotiate the agreement should be given at the Foreign Affairs Council on 14th June. Then, it will be a tough battle to insure that the EU regulations on GMOs are not jeopardised in the negotiations. From the US side, as seen in [a letter](#) to the Deputy National Security Advisor for International Economic Affairs of the White House, the agro-food industry is already pressing hard on the authorities to have what they consider as unjustifiable barriers to trade covered in (and removed from) the agreement.

EFSA

See ([GMO \(In\)digest 8](#)) After its adoption by the GMO scientific panel, the European Food Safety Agency (EFSA) has published a [guidance document](#) on how to evaluate the potential adverse effects of living Genetically Modified (GM) animals on the environment, including those on human and animal health. It lays down the requirements for applicants and risk assessors for collecting, evaluating and generating the information to complete the risk assessment for GM animals. EFSA claims that it has been finalised, following the consideration of more than 700 comments received from stakeholders and interested parties during a public consultation. However, the UK based NGO "Genewatch" has criticised the authority for publishing the guidance document while the ombudsman has not yet given its opinion on an alleged conflict of interest within the experts group that wrote the guidance document. Last February, "Genewatch" complained against EFSA to the EU ombudsman, on conflicts of interest within the expert group on GMO insects. Four of them have supposedly worked with UK Company "Oxitec", which lately deliberately released GMO mosquitoes in the open air and claim to market them to fight dengue. The ombudsman has asked EFSA to answer to these allegations by the end of June. The new environmental risk assessment complements previous guidance from EFSA on the safety of food and feed from GM animals published in 2012, completing the mandate from the Commission for comprehensive risk assessment guidelines on GM animals. While the Commission says that it is not planning to transform the EFSA guidance into a legally binding text, it still brings us one step closer to GMO animals in the EU. Until now, there has been no application for GMO animals in the EU, but the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is expected to approve a fast-growing GMO salmon before the end of the year.



EFSA's scientific independence has again been [questioned in PETI](#) on 27th May, where 3 petitions on GMOs were discussed, in particular on the persisting conflicts of interest and industry influence that affect European policy making and decision taking. On this occasion, Pr. Séralini, was invited to present his 2-years toxicological study on a GMO, Monsanto NK603 maize, and its associated herbicide, Round-up. At the heart of the matter is EFSA's conduct of handling risk assessments of GMOs, using a flawed methodology that has been written by the industry and data that are not public. All MEPs that were present showed concern about the industry influence in the GMO assessments, and none of them spoke in favour of the current system nor on the way EFSA takes independent scientific results into account. The consequence is that the petition remains open, which will in turn keep the political debate open while pressuring both the EFSA and the Commission to really put all data on the table. The Greens/EFA group will continue pressing for full transparency with a sound and independent methodology for the now newly announced 2-year toxicological study, to be performed in order to confirm or discard the results from Séralini's study.

Pro-Terra Foundation conference: Advancing sustainability together

On 14th May, the Pro-Terra Foundation organised a conference called "[Advancing sustainability together](#)" on how the food and feed industries can work together to advance sustainability, with numerous

stakeholders in the food chain and certifying bodies. Although the issue was wider than the GMO issue, it was clear that, as a confirmation of the [Greens/EFA group conference](#) on GMO-free labelling a few weeks earlier, the issue of GMO in the soya supply chain is a major concern of all actors and came predominantly in the debates. The interest for supply of GMO-free soybean and soymeal and for consumers' information, as well as for enabling regulation seems very high. At this occasion, the [Brussels soya declaration](#), a strong statement signed by major EU stakeholders calling for strong Brazilian and EU support for non-GMO soya has been distributed.

Member State/EU news:

UK

M&S, Co-op and Sainsbury's say chickens will be fed on GM soya

In a context of strong EU demand for animal products coming from non-GMO fed animals, 3 more UK retailers have caved to the agrofood industry and dropped their requirements for non-GMO feed. After Tesco, Asda and Morrisons, it is now Marks & Spencer, the Co-operative and Sainsbury's, 3 British supermarket retailers chains that are dropping their decade-long stance against selling chickens fed on genetically modified crops, claiming that non-GM feed for poultry is now too difficult to get and too expensive. This is at odds with what happens in other EU countries (see pro-Terra conference, above). Supermarket chains in Germany, France and Austria are increasing their use of non-GMO soya in livestock production in response to consumer demand. Environmental and consumers groups are [launching protests](#) against this move and are determined to inform consumers about it.

Around the world:

USA

Supreme Court rules for Monsanto in patent case against farmer

Vernon Hugh Bowman, a 75 year old soybean farmer from Indiana, was sued by Monsanto for patent infringement because he had re-sown and grown Round-up tolerant GMO soybean that had been patented by Monsanto. On 13th May, [the Supreme Court](#) has unanimously considered that intellectual protection of seeds does not allow a farmer to reproduce patented seeds by planting and harvesting them without permission from the patent owner and condemned Mr. Bowman to an outrageous 80.000 US \$ penalty: something ridiculous for the company, but deadly to a small farmer. This decision is a victory for Monsanto and plants patents owners, but a tragedy for farmers' rights in the US (and increasingly in other parts of the world) as it prohibits the foundation and the essence of agriculture. It considers farmers as mere executors and no more than food producers, stripping them of their independence. Preventing someone to grow food because of property claims on seeds is a scandal.

Diplomatic cables reveal aggressive GMO lobbying by US officials

Using the wealth of cables disclosed by Wikileaks, the US NGO "Food and Water Watch" reviewed more than 900 cables that show that American diplomats lobbied aggressively to promote GMO food crops such as soy beans and campaigned to break down resistance to GMO products in Europe and other countries. In their [report](#), "Food and Water Watch" describe a series of separate public relations strategies, unrolled at dozens of press junkets and biotech conferences, aimed at convincing scientists, media, industry, farmers, elected officials and others of the safety and benefits of GMO products. About 7% of the cables mentioned specific companies, and 6% mentioned Monsanto. "This corporate diplomacy was nearly twice as common as diplomatic efforts on food aid," the report said.

<http://m.guardian.co.uk/environment/2013/may/15/diplomatic-cables-gm-lobbying-us>

Philippines

[Bt eggplant field trials](#) stopped

After India, the Philippines have also banned field tests of GMO eggplant. The Philippines Court of Appeals ruled that ongoing field trials for *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) talong (eggplant) in the country pose risks to human health and the environment. According to the court's ruling, the trials violated the people's constitutional right to a balanced and healthy ecology as they involve the willful and deliberate alteration of the genetic traits of a living element of the ecosystem and the relationship of living organisms that depend on each other for their survival. The Court could not consider the field trials safe for human health and our ecology and stated that the government had failed to adopt sufficient biosafety protocols in conducting the trials to protect the environment and people's health.

<http://www.businessmirror.com.ph/index.php/business/agri-commodities/13830-ca-bt-eggplant-field-trials-unsafe-for-humans-environment>

India

GMO bananas on their way

Still in the heat of the debate on the safety regime on GMO food crops and the conflicts of interest within the Biotechnology Regulatory Authority, there are now new attempts to introduce GMO fruit in the pipeline. This time it is with a new GMO banana, supposedly modified in the laboratories of Australia to be iron-fortified and which is going to be shipped to India. Vandana Shiva's NGO, Navdanya, is launching a "No to GMO Bananas" campaign to protect biodiversity and indigenous knowledge with [a petition](#) to the Prime Minister of India urging him to cancel the GMO banana project and to stop the diversion of tax money to dangerous and useless projects, but instead to support biodiverse kitchen gardens and community gardens in women's hands.

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