News | 25.02.2014

Plant breeding

Report outlines the worst option for increasing quality and yields

Despite the opposition of the Greens/EFA MEPs, the Agriculture Committee voted with a huge majority in favour of this report, which misguidedly promotes the potential of new breeding techniques, such as GMOs and gene stacking[i], to increase quality and yields.

For the plenary vote on 25 February, the Greens/EFA Group introduced split and separate votes as well as roll-call votes on all the bad elements of this report.

The draft of this own-initiative report forms part of a strategic move by pro-GM supporters to launch a new GM charm-offensive for the new legislature. The plenary voting results therefore clearly show the extent of the complicity of some members with the corporate agenda, despite having been warned by NGOs.

Let's have a closer look at the old myths distilled in this report and why the Greens/EFA Group voted against it.

Contrary to the myth saying that we need to intensify or maintain chemically intensive production on cultivated land to maintain production levels, productivity is actually falling in the most intensively cultivated areas. On the other hand, there is sound scientific evidence to attest to the fact that we can only maintain productivity by allowing intensification of ecological functions such as pollination, soil fertility and formation, water and nutrient retention and regulation of pest populations by natural predators.

Intensive chemical inputs also provoke "collateral damage". For example, species not targeted by pesticides can be living in protected habitat 'islands' whilst actually surrounded by a 'sea' of toxic agriculture. These chemicals can also kill bees and pollinators which endangers food diversity and current productivity levels.

Another tenet of the productivist myth is the claim that we need to maintain or increase agro-chemical input intensity to "feed the world" by 2050.
However, Europe currently suffers from over production of food, with between 30-50% of our food ending up as waste. Besides, Europe does not feed the world (e.g. 89% of our vegetable proteins are imported from outside the EU), nor should it seek to do so. Parts of the world should be left to feed themselves. But currently the EU overproduces and dumps surplus on developing world markets, destroying both them and local production, which decreases food security in these regions.

This report promotes new farming techniques, such as GMO and gene stacking, as new solutions for agricultural problems. In practice, these techniques soak our countryside with toxins and only benefit the handful of companies that produce them. In fact there is no need to reinvent the wheel. All the solutions and knowledge and the tried-and-tested practices with long-term benefits for food security and the environment have already been discovered; they just need to be applied. Avoiding vast monocultures, better use of crop rotation, and better understanding of ecological systems is key for resilient and sustainable farming systems.

Last but not least, the report also arrogantly ignores the democratic stand of EU citizens -reflected in all opinion polls such as the Eurobarometer survey - and most EU governments against GMOs.

By voting against this report, the Greens/EFA Group loudly expresses its rebuttal of the old agro-chemical industry myths, which serve only the corporate agenda and are so detrimental to society and democracy as a whole.

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[i] Where multiple genes, e.g herbicide resistant genes with insecticide-producing genes, are spliced into the same genome.

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