

NGO joint response to the conference 'GMOs in European Agriculture and Food Production', Scheveningen 25-26 November 2009

NGOs have always pointed out the urgency to address the socio-economic impacts of GMOs. But the set up of this conference was biased towards the supposed benefits of GMOs. There was no time for real constructive debate. During the brief opportunities that were provided for dialogue with participants, some diverse opinions were expressed focusing on the risks and negative impacts of GMOs on farmers, consumers, food producers, agriculture, environment and markets. These viewpoints should be clearly reflected in the final conclusions, which we understand will be published as the official outcome of the conference.

The opening speech of Agriculture Minister Verburg made evident that the intention of the conference was to speed up the EU GMO approval process and abolish the zero-tolerance policy for non-authorized GMOs. This is not what the debate on socio-economic impacts should be about.

The discussion should not be narrowed down to just GM crops grown in Europe as Minister Cramer proposed. We strongly oppose this approach.

Within the EU, we need a socio-economic impact assessment for all the costs caused by imports and production of GMOs such as installation of segregation systems, controls and product recalls. The issues of contamination and liability have to be included.

We urge the European decision makers to take into account the experience gained with GMOs in other non- EU countries:

- health and environmental damage from the use of pesticides
- deforestation and loss of biodiversity
- the breakdown of rural communities

The EU has to take responsibility for its imported commodities as well.

The organisers of the 2-day conference not only failed to invite critical speakers from Brazil and the USA but also refused suggested speakers from Argentina and Paraguay who can give evidence of their negative experience with herbicide resistant crops, especially those living in the vicinity.

The outcome of the conference should take into account the conclusions of the IAASTD presented by Dr.Herren: Business as usual is not an option. Large scale imports of soy as animal feed can never be sustainable. To respond effectively to urgent problems of climate change, food security and environmental degradation we need a paradigm shift in agriculture. We have to focus on the existing ecological farming solutions. GMOs are part of the old paradigm and do not fit in.

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