



**Friends of
the Earth
Europe**

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CONFERENCE

17 May 2005

'Safeguarding sustainable European agriculture: Coexistence, GMO free zones and the promotion of quality food produce in Europe'

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Italy bans GM crops

On 25 January the higher chamber (Senate) of the Italian parliament gave its final approval to a law that will enable the Italian regions and autonomous provinces to adopt so-called "coexistence" measures in order to avoid the presence of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in other products. As long as the regions and autonomous provinces have not adopted such rules, the cultivation of transgenic crops is prohibited. According to the new law, violation of this temporary ban (or "moratorium") can be punished with a maximum of two years imprisonment or a fine of 50.000 euro.

The decision by the Italian parliament clearly indicates discontent with the position of the European Commission, that decided in May 2004 to lift the then 6 year old EU wide moratorium on GMOs. Many EU member states still feel uncomfortable with that move, since coexistence legislation to protect organic and conventional production from the risks of contamination by GMOs is still pending. Releasing GMOs without anti-contamination rules in force could lead to massive genetic contamination of the countryside, undermining of consumer choice and economic damage to organic and conventional farmers.

Victory for the regions

The law can be seen as a victory for the Italian regions and municipalities who massively reject the use of genetically modified products. According to the latest figures (published by the Italian news agency ANSA) a total of 14 (out of 20) regions and 1,806 municipalities in Italy have so far chosen to declare their territories GMO-free.

Following a strong lobby by the regions, environmental NGOs and farmers organisations the Italian parliament considerably strengthened a draft law by Agricultural minister Gianni Alemanno, which was already

adopted by the Italian cabinet in November 2004. Compared to the proposal by Alemanno, the Parliament introduced the following key changes:

- Protection of the environment. The parliament included protection of the environment as one of the key objectives in article one of the law, on top of "freedom of economic initiative" and "consumer's right to choose" that were already foreseen by the Minister. This addition by the parliament creates an important precedent and challenges the position of the European Commission, who has so far argued that coexistence measures can only be taken on economic and not on environmental grounds.
- An open end to the moratorium. In the original proposal it said that the regions and autonomous provinces shall adopt their coexistence measures before 31 December 2005. This deadline has been removed by the parliament, with the consequence that the temporary ban on GMOs is now open ended as well.
- A zero threshold for GMOs in seeds. Under current Italian law any presence of GMOs in non genetically modified (GM) seeds is already forbidden. The Italian parliament also introduced this provision in the new coexistence law.
- Liability. In article five, the parliament has introduced the polluter-pays-principle, meaning that a GM farmer can be held liable for the damage caused by genetic contamination (the unwanted presence of GMOs) in neighbouring organic or conventional fields. However, it is unclear what happens if a GM farmer follows the coexistence rules to be set up by the regions and contamination is still happening. Potentially, this situation could be covered by a compensation fund. The possibility for the regions and autonomous provinces to set up such funds, has been introduced by the parliament in article four of the new law.

- The parliament has raised the sanctions for those who violate the moratorium on GMOs. In the original proposal by Alemanno the maximum fine was 25.000 euros, the parliament raised this amount to 50.000. It also added the possibility of jail time for operators who do not respect the temporary ban on GMOs.

Minister "very pleased"

After the vote in the Senate, Minister Alemanno told the Italian newsagency ANSA he was "very pleased" by the legislation's final passage. "We sought to... guarantee freedom of choice for Italian producers, while heading off the risk of diffuse and uncontrolled contamination by GM (organisms)," he was quoted as saying by ANSA news service.

What's next?

According to the new Italian law a national "Committee on the coexistence of transgenic, conventional and organic crops" shall be set up. This Committee shall draft guidelines on coexistence, which have to be followed by the regions and autonomous provinces when taking coexistence measures. The Committee shall be composed of qualified experts in the area, two of whom shall be appointed by the Ministry of Agriculture, two by the Ministry of Environment and four by the Standing Committee for the relations between the State, the Regions and the autonomous provinces. According to the new law, the Committee has to present its guidance within 120 days. As soon as the Committee has presented its report the Italian regions and autonomous provinces can start working on their coexistence legislation.

Hungary bans Monsanto's GM seeds

In January, Hungary, one of the biggest grain producers in the new EU, became the first country in Eastern Europe to ban genetically modified (GM) maize when it outlawed the planting of Monsanto's MON 810 hybrid seeds.

Background

On 8th September, the European Commission decided to list 17 genetically modified maize varieties derived from Monsanto's MON 810 in the European Union's Common Catalogue of Seeds. This controversial decision was seen as premature by a majority of EU Member States (see Biotech Mailout December 2004). Since Monsanto's MON 810 maize was originally approved by the EU back in 1998, the new Member States were not involved in the decision-making process, so their specific climatic and ecological conditions were not taken into account. In the meantime, new studies show further ecological risks associated with the use of MON 810 maize. These led the Hungarian authorities to ban MON 810 seeds on the basis of the safeguard clause provided by Article 23 (1) of EU Directive 2001/18 concerning the deliberate release of GMOs into the environment.

Temporary ban of MON 810 maize seeds

On 19th January 2005, after a government meeting, Imre Németh, the Hungarian Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (as the competent authority) reported the decision banning the production, use, marketing and import of maize seeds derived from MON 810.¹ This tem-

porary ban entered into force on 20th January and will remain valid until such time as it is withdrawn. The ban also applies to any new plants produced by crossing MON 810 with any traditional maize variety.

On the other hand, the ban does not apply to the use of maize containing the MON 810 gene construction in food production or animal feed, provided that it is ensured that the maize will not be released into the environment. According to Mr Németh, none of the maize varieties containing the MON 810 gene construction are allowed to be planted. Bogár László, the spokesperson of the Hungarian Prime Minister, added: "*A final decision is expected after the scientific assessment has been concluded*".

Reasons behind the decision

MON 810 maize was approved for marketing in the EU on 5th August 1998 under EU Directive 90/220/EEC. Subsequently, the approval process for GMOs was suspended in the EU since several Member States raised concerns about the lack of research on the possible short and long term ecological and health risks. With the implementation of stricter legislation on traceability and labelling, the approval process re-started in May 2004.

Negotiations on Hungary's accession to the EU and the country's comments on the Accession Treaty happened while the EU's GMO approval process was suspended and seeds derived from MON 810 maize were not allowed to be marketed

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in EU Member States. When the approval process re-started in 2004, neither the specific bio-geographical conditions of the new Member States, nor the possible environmental risks resulting therefrom were taken into account. In spite of this, the European Commission listed 17 MON 810 GM maize varieties in the EU's Common Catalogue of Seeds. This means that farmers can now plant these seeds in any EU Member State without further protective measures or even without informing third parties, except in countries like Austria, Italy, Germany and Denmark which have introduced their own safety measures. For example, Austria banned MON 810 in 1998, while in Italy no cultivation of GMOs is currently allowed at all (see article on page 1 of this Biotech Mailout.). In Germany and Denmark, farmers are bound by restrictions on the basis of national co-existence laws (see Biotech Mailouts July 2004 and December 2004).

Environmental impacts

In 2003, scientists from the Hungarian Scientific Academy started an environmental impact assessment of a maize variety derived from MON 810, but not included in the 17 varieties recently listed in the EU Common Catalogue. The results of experiments with this maize containing the YieldGard™ MON 810 gene construction and producing its own pesticide showed certain damage to the ecosystem caused by the presence of the GMO:

- Via the GM maize, the amount of toxin ending up in the environment is considerably higher as compared to traditionally used organic techniques.
- The remains of the GM plants degraded slower than their conventional counterparts. Eight percent of the toxin was detectable in the field after harvest, and significant parts of the active toxin could be detected in the soil 11 months later.

- In the fields of GM maize, gross biological activities in the soil were lower than in control fields.
- Caterpillars living in the maize fields and on weeds growing in the fields or on the edges of fields could be affected by the toxins produced by the MON 810 plants. This is important since 16% of the 187 protected butterfly species in Hungary could be found living on weeds at the edges of agricultural fields. According to the researchers, the pollen containing the toxin produced by the GM plant threatens in particular the Peacock butterfly and the Red Admiral both butterfly species.

Further risk assessment required

As mentioned above, the addition of 17 GM maize varieties derived from MON 810 to the EU's Common Catalogue of Seeds allows all these varieties to be used throughout the Union, even though the environmental risk assessment required for approval only applies to the old 15 Member States. The varieties derived from MON 810 were approved under the old EU Directive 90/220/EEC which did not require such thorough risk assessment as the new Directive 2001/18/EC. Specifically, Annex II of Directive 2001/18/EC requires assessment of the long-term cumulative effects of the deliberate release of GM varieties approved for cultivation. Furthermore, according to Article 4 (4) of Directive 2002/53/EC on the Common Catalogue of Seeds, the deliberate release of GM varieties should only be accepted if all necessary measures have been taken to avoid the risks to human health and environment.

Therefore, a new risk assessment of MON 810 is required because, with Hungary's accession to the EU, a new ecological region has become part of the European Union. Because of the different environmental conditions, Hungary's accession

to the EU places a question mark on the validity of the earlier risk assessment which only took into account the ecosystems of the old Member States.

Specifically in the Pannon bio-geographical region of Hungary, a comprehensive environmental impact assessment is necessary because of the irreversible nature of the release of GMOs into nature and the unique ecological conditions of that region. The environmental impact assessment of MON 810 has already started but substantive results, taking into account the biological cycles, can only be expected after several years.

Protection of Hungarian Agriculture

Although not officially mentioned by the Hungarian government, the ban is of great impor-

tance for Hungarian farmers because the introduction of GM seeds in maize production would endanger their position on the sensitive European market. Maize is cultivated on 1.2 - 1.3 millions hectares in Hungary, and most is exported to the European market. The introduction of transgenic varieties in Hungary could cause GM contamination, thus jeopardising the possibility to export crops to other EU countries where consumers demand GM-free food. As long as the ban is in force, the principle that Hungarian crops are GM-free, and that Hungarian crops and food products can be sold in the EU market will remain intact.

By Robert Fidrich

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EU blocks transparency and public participation on GMOs

The Aarhus Convention (AC) is a UN legal instrument whose objective is to guarantee the public rights of access to information, participation in decision-making, and access to justice in environmental matters. The Aarhus Convention has a set of comprehensive provisions on public participation which apply to a broad range of activities that can have an impact on the environment in the sectors of energy, production and process-

ing of metals, the mineral industry, the chemical industry, waste management, etc.

Activities involving GMOs were not included in the list of activities, which are subject to the public participation requirements of the AC, and were instead deferred to national legislation. This exclusion was an anomaly which is why, immediately after the adoption of the AC in 1998, the

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Signatories requested that the First Meeting of the Parties further develop the application of the Convention to the field of GMOs. A Task Force on GMOs was created in 2000, followed by a Working Group in 2001, and a second Working Group in 2002.

The AC covers Parties from the Pan-European region, including Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia (EECCA). All 25 European Union (EU) Member States, and the European Community as such, have signed the Convention, and an increasing number have already ratified it.

EECCA call for the right to public participation in GMO decision-making

During four years, Parties and Signatories to the Convention, NGOs and industry have been discussing how to solve the anomaly concerning GMOs. Since 2001, a large majority of EECCA countries have demonstrated unequivocally their desire to establish a legally binding provision to grant the public rights of participation in decisions related to GMO activities in the framework of the Aarhus Convention. They have declared this in a precise text for an amendment to the AC. Other countries, like Norway, have also clearly expressed their support of that approach.

On 1st-4th February 2005, the Parties and Signatories of the AC met to prepare the Second Meeting of the Parties of the Convention to be held in Kazakhstan in May this year. Over 10 non-EU countries present from Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, reaffirmed the need to grant the public in the region the right to participate in decisions related to GMOs. Countries from this region believe in the need for a common pan-European approach to public participation. The EU, however, despite having legally

binding provisions on public participation in its own legislation, was unable to express any position, creating once again a de facto blocking of the discussions.

The EU blocks the discussion

More than four years of discussions should have given the EU enough time to adopt a position. Although some EU Member States have demonstrated their flexibility and constructive spirit, the attitude of the European Commission and some other EU Member States - in particular France - has prevented any progress and instead has created a de facto block in the discussions. The Commission and France have always opposed the position of the EECCA countries. The biotech industry, which is against binding obligations for public participation on GMOs, and which is actively present at the meetings, has - unsurprisingly- openly supported the views of the European Commission and France.

The EU, therefore, has never managed to back any common position since the adoption of the AC, due both to internal divisions and the almost iron will within the EU coordination preventing Member States from choosing sides in the public debate. France, however, continues to defy this approach and, once again, made it very clear at the February meeting that it opposes the AC incorporating any adequate public participation obligations related to GMOs.

The 'rationale' for the opposition

The European Commission is subject of huge pressure from the biotech industry and major GMO-exporting countries over the GMO situation in Europe. The firm opposition of the European Commission to any positive outcome of the AC process has a strong political character

within the wider debate surrounding the Cartagena Protocol and the current WTO case concerning the EU moratorium and the national bans. The European Commission wants to avoid further disputes with the US and other pro-biotech countries, and does not want to extend the issue of GMOs in any other international fora. This despite the general agreement of which it is part, since October 2002, to develop a legally binding solution for GMO decision-making under the Aarhus Convention.

Furthermore, the European Commission and the French delegation have constantly argued that any comprehensive legislation on public participation on GMOs within Aarhus will damage the Biosafety Protocol process. Apparently there has been pressure from the biotech industry and some of the major GMO exporters whereby, if the public participation requirements of the AC are extended to GMO activities, pro-biotech countries will consider it a huge affront that will make the current discussions on the implementation of the Biosafety Protocol, and the WTO GMO case, even worse for the EU. It has even been mentioned that the Aarhus issue could complicate the Biosafety Protocol ratification of major GMO exporters like Canada.

A false argument

However, this argumentation about the incompatibility between the AC and the Biosafety Protocol is false and has been artificially constructed. A letter from Mr. Zedan, the Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity, to the Secretary of the Aarhus Convention completely clarifies the issue, and underlines the mutually supportive character of both international instruments. Mr. Zedan described *"the important role that the Aarhus Convention was playing in promoting public*

participation in decision-making on GMOs and agreed that the Cartagena Protocol and the Aarhus Convention could complement each other and be mutually supportive". The Secretary of the Convention went even further expressing his *"belief that the outcome of the processes under the Aarhus Convention, in particular discussions in the Working Group on GMOs, would contribute significantly to the consideration of the subject matter under the Cartagena Protocol"*.

The way forward

Countries from the EECCA region have clearly expressed their will to grant the public the right to participate in GMO-related activities in an international agreement that covers the whole European region, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. These countries have expressed the desire to adopt an amendment to the AC, which guarantees such a right. The EU should, therefore, respect and listen to their request, and support the adoption of such an amendment. EU Member States already have their own legally binding provisions on GMOs and do not have substantial reasons to deny countries from the EECCA region similar rights. The EU must not allow pressure from biotech industry and pro-biotech countries to block progress in the AC.

The EU will be discussing this topic at the Council meeting on March 10th. The EU must take a position, which is in line with the demands of the EECCA countries so that in May, at the Second Meeting of the Parties to the Convention in Kazakhstan, a comprehensive amendment can be adopted. If, however, the EU adopts a position against the will of those countries, or fails to adopt any position, it will send an extremely damaging signal to the EECCA region. If that happens, the EU will have betrayed the public of the pan-European region.

US draft guidance could legalise GM contamination in American food

Over the past two decades, the United States government has done everything possible to promote its biotechnology industry and push genetically modified (GM) foods on the rest of the world. As part of these efforts, in 2002 the Bush administration issued a White House directive that would make contamination of the food supply with unapproved, experimental genetically modified (GM) crops "acceptable". The directive is now in the process of being implemented by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Though presented as a food safety measure, the true intent of the policy is to ignore concern over experimental GM traits that escape test plots and contaminate the food and seed supply.

The FDA released its draft guidance to implement Office of Science and Technology Policy's (OSTP) directive on 19th November 2004. The proposal sets guidelines allowing companies to voluntarily consult with the FDA on the potential human health impacts of new GM proteins that escape test plots and enter the food supply. This policy is inadequate for several reasons:

- Like all FDA regulation of GM foods, it is voluntary rather than mandatory. Companies are not required to consult with the FDA at all.
- The safety assessment is limited to GM crops producing novel proteins, thus it does not apply to GM crops with metabolic alterations (e.g. for altered oil content or gene silencing)

that do not generate novel proteins.

- The policy does not call for any animal tests or advanced analytical techniques to detect unintended effects of the contaminating GM trait, such as unexpected elevations in the levels of native allergen or toxins, or lowered levels of key nutrients.
- The FDA only requests two simple tests to indicate whether the novel GM protein is likely to be allergen or toxin, and fails to even specify how such tests are to be conducted. However, experience shows that companies choose test conditions to get the results they want, conditions that can deviate greatly from internationally accepted test protocols.
- Like the USDA, the FDA sets no limit for the amount of GM contaminant allowed in foods, but merely assumes it will be low.

Clearly, the FDA's policy will do little or nothing to enhance food safety. In a recent speech, Lester Crawford, acting Commissioner of the FDA, suggested other purposes for the new guidance: "*The development of this guidance is a high priority for the Administration and the industry, to enhance public confidence, avoid product recalls, and provide an international model to address the presence of low levels of bioengineered plant material in non-bioengineered crop fields*".

This suggests that the FDA may soon allow contamination of the food chain with residues from GM pharmaceutical crops (these are crops that produce drugs) as well.

Previously, in January 2004, the USDA had sought public comment on the conditions under which it should approve "*intermittent and low-level*" contamination, which it calls "adventitious presence". However, the USDA did not define what it meant by "low-level" (e.g. 0,1%, 1%, 10%?) or intermittent (e.g. once a day, once a month or once a year?) contamination, nor it is likely to do so.

Why is this happening?

The roots of this contamination approval policy can be traced back to September 2000 when food products in the US were discovered to be contaminated with StarLink, a variety of GM maize unapproved for human consumption. The contamination triggered massive food recalls and lawsuits that, in the end, cost the biotech and food industries an estimated \$1 billion in damages. In July, the EPA rejected a petition from Aventis CropScience (StarkLink's developer) to establish a tolerance level (i.e. maximum allowable level) for StarLink in the food supply, thereby endorsing a "zero tolerance" policy for unapproved GM traits in food. Aventis had sought this tolerance level in order to avoid liability for recalls and potential health impacts from consumption of StarLink-contaminated products. Years after it was banned, StarLink has continued to show up in US maize, as well as food shipments to Bolivia, Japan, South Korea and recently in Central America.

Like StarLink, experimental and pharmaceutical GM crops are not intended for human consumption, pose potential health and environmental risks, and could be considered adulterants if even small amounts get into food and grain. The biotechnology and grain industries believe that establishment of this policy will help shield them from potential liability in the event of a StarLink-like contamination episode involving experimen-

tal GM crops in the food chain.

The proposal only satisfies the biotech industry by spreading GMOs worldwide

The Biotechnology Industry Organisation (BIO) and the US grain industry regard implementation of the White House directive as "*enormously important*". But they are not satisfied with implementation in the U.S. alone. In an April 2004 joint press release, these powerful trade groups instructed the US government that it "*must vigorously promote global adoption of compatible regulatory systems ... as a key element in a much-needed comprehensive and harmonised global approval system for regulation of agricultural products of modern biotechnology*". One has to wonder whether such an "approval system" would ever reject a GM crop contaminant as unsafe. This language recalls the comment of FDA Commissioner Lester Crawford in the speech cited above, in which he described one purpose of the FDA guidance as providing "*an international model to address the presence of low levels of bioengineered plant material in non-bioengineered crop fields*".

Clearly, the US government and industry are united in their resolve to have the rest of the world follow their lead. This is because only a "global approval system" on the US model would allow US biotech and food companies to export food products contaminated with experimental, potentially hazardous GM traits without fear of recalls or other liability.

Polluting the sources

Consumers, farmers and environments worldwide will be unwittingly exposed to GM contamination that in some cases may pose human health and environmental risks. Most of the transgenes introduced into GM plants undergoing field tests are kept secret from the public as "confidential

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business information" (CBI) of the crop developer. The percentage of field tests with CBI has been climbing steadily since field trials began, from 0 % in 1987 to 69 % in 2000. ¹ There are no ways of knowing whether these undisclosed GM crops pose health or environmental risks. Furthermore, there will be no way to identify GMO material because, after all, you can only test for something if you know what you are looking for.

Even more disturbing is the growing evidence that GM traits have widely contaminated certified seed stocks. This means that farmers will never know for certain if the seeds they buy are free from genetic contamination. And without that knowledge, they will be unable to take measures to prevent further spread of the trait to their own or neighbours' crops.

Consequences in Europe

In the last 6-7 years, in response to consumer rejection of GMOs in Europe, the EU revised its regulatory framework to include wider issues such as traceability, labelling and other procedures to

avoid GMO contamination, the so-called co-existence measures. This process is still under way. In this context, many regions have declared themselves a GM-free zone and want the European Union to recognise this right. If the US allows contamination of its food, the motivation to keep a GM-free Europe is bound to increase, as well as consumer suspicion about US products. If the US plan goes ahead, the EU will struggle to guarantee that the European system will work without avoiding US products, since food could be GM contaminated and it will be virtually impossible to know it. This outrageous plan, therefore, needs to be stopped.

The full draft guidance can be found here:
<http://www.fda.gov/bbs/topics/ANSWERS/2004/ANS01327.html>

References:

1 Caplan, R. (2003). Raising Risk: Field Testing of Genetically engineered Crops in the United States. U.S. PRIG Education Fund, June. <http://www.uspirg.org/reports.RaisingRisk/pdf>

Can GM crops benefit wildlife?

In November 2004, the final report of the BRIGHT project (Botanical and Rotational Implications of Genetically Modified Herbicide Tolerance in winter oilseed rape and sugar beet) was published.¹ This four year study, jointly funded by the UK government and industry, was intended to consider the agronomic issues of growing genetically

modified herbicide-tolerant (GMHT) crops, with environmental measurements being added during the course of the project. The results were published in the UK amid press reports that "GM crops are no more harmful to the environment than conventional plant varieties, a major UK study has found".²

However, Friends of the Earth considers that this conclusion was not justified by the results of the research. The only environmental measurements made in the BRIGHT study were of the weed seed-bank size and species. There were no measurements of invertebrates, soil microflora, gene flow to wild species, or field margin effects. The project's assessment of environmental impact rested largely upon the weed seed-bank measurements, but Friends of the Earth considers that the weed seed data and subsequent analysis are insufficiently clear to allow firm conclusions to be drawn on the nature of changes in the composition of the weed seed-banks, or the impact of these changes for biodiversity. English Nature, the UK government's wildlife advisory body, has commented that "*This new study adds little to what we already know about the impacts on wildlife of these cropping systems*".³

More recently, biotech industry funded research suggested that it might be possible to grow GMHT sugar beet so that it would not harm wildlife, by using two different methods to apply the herbicide.⁴ While much has been made of this by those in favour of GM crops, there is no evidence that this approach would actually be applied by farmers. The UK's Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) commented that "*Based on a meagre four sites this study has to be put in the 'interesting but not convincing' category*".⁵

So why the interest in two reports that appear to show very little? In part, because they indicate a response from the pro-biotech lobby to the findings of the UK government's farm scale evaluations of GM herbicide-tolerant crops. This four year study compared the effects on farmland biodiversity of the management regimes associated with GMHT crops and conventional crops. The results for the spring-sown crops (maize, sugar

and fodder beet, spring oilseed rape) were published by the Royal Society of London in November 2003 and the results for winter oilseed rape are due in March 2005. In the case of beet crops and spring oilseed rape, it was concluded that the management of the GM crops caused a reduction in food and habitats for farmland wildlife, compared to the conventionally grown crops. In the case of maize, the opposite was found, in part because the conventional maize in the trials was grown using the extremely powerful weed killer atrazine, which has since been banned.

As a result, in March 2004, the UK government's Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment (ACRE) stated that GMHT beet and spring oilseed rape should not be grown in the UK. While the UK did give a conditional approval for GM maize to be grown, the biotech company Bayer voluntarily withdrew it on the grounds that it was not economically viable.

The biotech lobby in the UK needs to undo some of the damage done to their cause by the findings of the farm scale evaluations, and the promotion of these recent reports can be viewed in that context. Another response has been to suggest that it might be possible to use alternative management regimes to 'compensate' for the negative impacts, for example using of additional uncropped areas, or alterations elsewhere in the agricultural rotation. However, Friends of the Earth Europe believes that such an approach would be unlikely to be effective, practicable or enforceable on a wide enough scale to deliver protection for biodiversity.

The EU has made specific commitments to reversing the decline in farmland biodiversity. The reform of the Common Agricultural Policy

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represents the first steps towards a system that seeks to deliver wildlife improvements and a healthy environment, as well as food. Against that background, the impacts of GM crops on biodiversity have to be taken seriously, and regulators and policy makers across the EU will need to revise their yardstick for evaluation. It is no

longer acceptable to allow developments that only lead to further decline in wildlife, or merely maintain the status quo. In the future, agricultural developments will need to enhance biodiversity, and there is little evidence that genetically modified herbicide tolerant crops will be able to meet this requirement.

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- 4 M May, G Champion, A Dewar, A Qi and J Pidgeon (2005) *Management of genetically modified herbicide tolerant sugar beet for spring and autumn environmental benefit* *Proceedings of The Royal Society B: Biological Sciences.*
- 5 Dr Mark Avery, Director of Conservation, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, letter to the Daily Telegraph, 25th January 2005.

CONFERENCE

'Safeguarding sustainable European agriculture: Coexistence, GMO free zones and the promotion of quality food produce in Europe'

European Parliament
Altiero Spinelli Building, 1st Floor, Room A1G3
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Tuesday, 17 May 2005, 8:30 - 17:30

Organised by Friends of the Earth Europe and the Assembly of European Regions (AER), at the kind invitation of Mr Janusz Wojciechowski -member of the European Parliament- and with the support of the regions of Upper Austria and Tuscany.

The conference is free of charge and open to political delegates from the Member States and their regions, to representatives of EU institutions, relevant NGOs, scientists and industry representatives.

To register and find further information, see: www.gmofree-conference.org
Deadline for registration is 2 May.

Friends of the Earth Europe (FoEE) campaigns for sustainable and fair societies and for the protection of the environment, unites more than 30 national organisations with thousands of local groups and is part of the world's largest grassroots environmental network, Friends of the Earth International. FoEE gratefully acknowledges EU funding support.

The Biotech Mailout is printed quarterly and is also available online at
www.foeeurope.org/GMOs/Index.htm

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