

FoEE Biotech Mailout

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GMO POLLUTION (1)

The illegal GM oilseed rape scandal

During May, it became apparent that more than 6,000 hectares of farmland in the European Union - France, Germany, Luxembourg, Sweden and the UK - has been planted this spring with GM-contaminated oilseed rape. The seed was sold by the company Advanta (a joint venture of the Anglo-Swedish corporation Astra Zeneca and the Dutch firm Cosun). Advanta claims to have discovered 'the mistake' on 3rd April 2000 and to have immediately informed the authorities in the countries concerned (the British government said it was informed on 17th April). The company also admitted that the same thing had already happened in 1999 and that, for example in the UK, the surface area involved then was even bigger than this year (9000 hectares, compared to 4,700 in 2000).

The contamination was first brought to light by a press release issued by the Swedish Board of Agriculture on 16th May, and became public in the UK following a question in parliament on 17th May (the day after another at-

tack on GMOs in food and farming by the heir to the throne, Prince Charles). On 18th May, Advanta Seeds indicated that other countries such as France and Germany were also affected.

Advanta claims that the contamination happened in Canada due to pollen from a genetically modified oilseed rape, 'GT 73' tolerant of Monsanto's herbicide Roundup. The pollen from the Monsanto rape was blown onto fields of conventional oilseed rape, 'Hyola 38', which was being grown for seed. The fields were reportedly at least 800 metres and up to as far as 1.4 kilometres away from each other. According to Advanta and the UK government, the level of contamination of the Advanta seed by the GM variety is around 1%. However, a company selling Advanta's seed to

Swedish farmers has stated that "parts of this year's imports from Canada of the same variety have been shown to contain some 2.6% of Roundup-resistant seed".

The legality question

Before genetically modified seed can be sold in the European Union, it must have been granted market consent under the Deliberate Release Directive 90/220/EEC. To date, no applications for approval to cultivate GM oilseed rape have been successful - two applications from Plant Genetic Systems (a division of AgrEvo) have never completed the procedure because of France's decision to block final market consent. Another AgrEvo variety is approved against Directive 90/220/EEC but only for import and processing.

There is no market consent for Monsanto's 'GT 73' GM oilseed rape and, based on recent information from the European Commission, there is no application for such approval against Directive

More than 6,000 hectares of farmland in the EU has been planted with GM-contaminated oilseed rape this spring



Friends of the Earth

90/220/EEC. Without marketing consent, GM seeds and crops cannot be sold for food or industrial purposes, or fed to livestock.

Refined oil derived from 'GT 73' oilseed rape can, however, be sold in the EU under the Novel Food Regulation (NFR) (on the basis of a report by the UK's Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes). The NFR allows for notification of foods derived from, but not containing, GMOs which are "substantially equivalent" to conventional foods. However, the Italian government recently challenged the approval of 'GT 73' oilseed rape oil, claiming that the oil is not actually the same as conventional oilseed rape oil. In fact, they claim that the approval, based on the UK ACNFP's report is "unlawful".

'Sterile' seed

As the storm surrounding the contaminated oilseed rape gathered pace around Europe, farmers protested while politicians flustered as they were forced to face up to GMO pollution in their own back yard. In the UK, where the government was already admitting that 'buffer zones' surrounding GM crops are ineffective (*see separate article in this Mailout*), Agriculture Minister Nick Brown tried to reassure the public by saying that he believed "the oilseed rape poses no threat to the environment because the variety is sterile and it is difficult to see how it could cross-pollinate with other plants".

Friends of the Earth in the UK, however, pointed out that this GM variety is NOT 'sterile', but rather 'male sterile' which means that the plants cannot produce any pollen themselves. The 'female' part of these plants, nevertheless, is fully functional - they are perfectly capable of producing seed if they are pollinated by other oilseed rape plants. The GM plants are mixed up in fields of normal oilseed rape which produce masses of pollen. As a result, the GM seed which is produced will

inevitably find its way into food and animal feed.

To date, no applications for approval for commercial cultivation of GM oilseed rape in the EU have been successful

Investigations by FoE have found that the 'sterility' claimed for these GM plants will break down in their offspring. A leading seed scientist has told FoE that, if Advanta Seed's claims about these GM plants are correct, half of their offspring will be genetically modified and tolerant of the herbicide Roundup, and one quarter of the total will be fully fertile. These rogue plants will be able to produce pollen, which could contaminate crops or spread to wild plants, as well as producing seeds.

Oilseed rape seeds are easily dropped on the ground during harvest - studies have shown that as many as 10,000 oilseed rape seeds can be dropped per square metre. Oilseed rape seeds can survive in the soil and later grow as weeds ('volunteers') in other crops. If they are dropped onto open ground or alongside roads, they can also survive and reproduce outside agricultural areas. In view of Advanta's admission that GM seed was already sold and cultivated last year, this raises several questions: How many GM seeds were dropped last year in fields and along roads? How many survived to grow as weeds this year? How many GM seeds from this year's crop will be dropped around the countryside this autumn if the GM contaminated crops are not destroyed?

Different reactions in Member States

Reactions in EU Member States were different - while some governments dithered, other European countries moved more quickly to address the problem.

Sweden

On May 24, the Swedish Board of Agriculture (SBA) ordered farmers to destroy the estimated 600 hectares which had been planted with the Advanta oilseed rape, before it developed sufficiently to produce new seed (by 7th July at the latest). The decision is based on Chapter 13 section 12 in the Environmental Code (SFS 1998:808), which states that a consent shall be obtained for the deliberate release of GMOs or the placing on the market of products containing or consisting of such organisms. According to the SBA, this means that even if the release was unintentional when the oilseed rape was sown, the grower is obliged to destroy the crop before the seeds have matured. The SBA left as an option for farmers not wishing to destroy the crop the possibility to apply for a consent for experimental trials.

Some 14 tons of 'Hyola 38' are believed to have been imported into Sweden last year from Canada which, when tested, revealed the presence of 0.4% of GM seed ('GT 73'). Imports of the same variety this year are reported to show a considerably higher level of contamination, up to 2.6%, but this was detected before the seed was sold on to seed distributors, according to the SBA.

The text of the announcement by the SBA is available on the www.sjv.se

France

An estimated 600 hectares of farmland was sown with contaminated oilseed rape in France, which currently has a two-year national moratorium on the cultivation of GM rape and beet. Agriculture Minister Jean Glavany initially appeared to dismiss the importance of the situation, calling it "a storm in a tea-cup". However, on 25th May, one day after the Swedish decision, the French government ordered that all the fields of rape be destroyed (despite reports that Environment Minister Voynet and Glavany were split on the is-

sue, the latter apparently being opposed to destruction of the crop.

Germany

Some 400 hectares of land were reported to have been sown with the contaminated oilseed rape in Germany. The Agriculture Minister announced that due to the low level of contamination - in the order of 0.03% according to him - it was not necessary for the fields of contaminated oilseed rape to be destroyed. However, Greenpeace and farmers took matters into their own hands - the environmental group helped a farmer to cut down five hectares of oil seed rape in southwestern Germany at Langenau, near the city of Ulm shortly before it started to bloom. Greenpeace says the farmer will sue Advanta and Greenpeace has threatened court action against the government and the company. To date, the German Ministry of Agriculture has taken no steps to make sure that the contaminated fields are destroyed and the farmers compensated by Advanta.

UK

The British government continued to dither and issue conflicting messages. Having said that there was no legal basis for ordering the destruction of the oilseed rape, it then advised farmers would not be able to market the illegal seed in the European Union and would have to find markets outside the EU! The estimated 600 farmers affected (the majority of which, some 500, are in Scotland) - faced with a non-existent market for their crops - began to voluntarily destroy the oilseed rape. The National Farmers Union threatened legal action against the government, while The Soil Association representing organic farmers and growers, as well as environmental groups were up in arms at the lack of action taken by ministers.

In the end, Advanta itself bit the bullet and announced on 2nd June that "After detailed discussions of

other alternatives, Advanta has now determined that at this late stage in the growing season, the only practical course of action is for farmers to remove these crops".

A threshold for contaminated seed?

In a joint letter from Joachim Winter, secretary general of the European Seeds Association (ESA) to the European Commissioners Fischler, Byrne and Wallström, members of the European Parliament, EU governments, etc. etc., the ESA suggests that the European Union accept the threshold of 1% of contamination of conventional seeds by GMOs as a legal standard. Quoting the example of GM maize, the ESA claims that the 1% threshold is already being applied as a 'voluntary common standard' in France. The association, however, fails to underline the facts that (a) genetically modified maize is approved for cultivation in France whereas cultivation of GM oilseed rape is banned under the French moratorium, and (b) no GM oilseed rape varieties have completed approval for cultivation in the EU. Furthermore, current EU rules do not allow such contamination thresholds for cultivation.

The European Commission, in the meantime, according to a report in "Farming News" of 15th June, is proposing a 0.5% GMO tolerance level for seed. Under the proposal, contamination up to 0.5% of conventional seeds by GM seeds - if approved in the EU - would be acceptable, but contamination by unapproved GMOs would not. In the latter case, the crop would be "destroyed and sent back", says "Farming News". The Commission is reported to be urging Member States to agree on implementation

as soon as possible, while discussions continue on wider GM regulations.

The cost of the fiasco

It became clear during the first week of June that the European Commission will, in fact, still pay premiums to the farmers affected by the contaminated GM oilseed rape, under an ad hoc special arrangement, even though the crops are destroyed. According to "Agence Europe", surface payments will be made for rape which has been kept in normal conditions until flowering or until June 30th. Farmers may then decide to re-sow the area but they will not be able to receive any further premium for a second crop. According to Associated Press in France, the Commission will pay 82 Euros, or 537 French Francs, for each ton of the contaminated rape 'harvested' before the end of June.

Advanta has also announced that it will pay compensation to the farmers affected in the U.K. and France, although it does not accept legal responsibility for the problem. In the UK alone, this compensation has been estimated at around £2 million, although the actual amount of money farmers will receive from the company remains unclear and depends on what the EU pays out.

So the cost in financial terms, both to the company concerned and to the European Union (and therefore EU tax payers) will be enormous. The cost to the environment, to consumers who want to avoid GM foods, and to organic farmers could be incalculable. (GL)

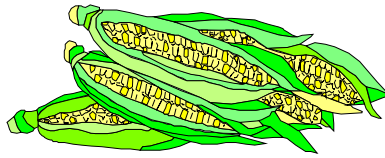
The cost of the fiasco in financial terms will be enormous ... the cost to the environment, to consumers and to organic farmers could be incalculable

GMO POLLUTION (2)

GM contaminated maize confirmed in France

Almost exactly one month after it was strenuously denied that maize contaminated with illegal GM varieties was being sown in France, the truth came out in mid-June when it was revealed that up to 23 départements in the south-west - including Gironne Atlantique, Lot-et-Garonne, Maine-et-Loire and Pyrénées-Atlantiques - are affected by GM-contaminated maize. The situation has been confirmed by Marylise Lebrachu, French Secretary of State for small and medium enterprises/trade.

According to reports in the French press, up to 4,800 hectares of land may have been planted with supposedly non-GM maize seed contaminated by a genetically modified variety. Results of analyses carried out in December 1999 were apparently already available at the end of February this year and were communicated to the importer, Golden Harvest, in early March but by then some of the seed had already been sold for



planting. Golden Harvest, for its part, contested the analyses which led to new samples being taken for testing which delayed further results until April.

Unsurprisingly, the seed originates in the United States. The level of GM contamination is reported not to exceed 1% and concerns three different GM varieties: Novartis Bt 176 (authorised for cultivation in the EU), Novartis Bt 11 (authorised for import and processing in the EU but NOT for cultivation, and a third, as yet, unidentified variety).

Up to 4,800 hectares of lands may have been planted with GM-contaminated seed

Environmentalists and farming organisations are protesting strongly against this further case of contaminated seed, which follows swiftly on the heels of the GM oilseed rape scandal currently affecting at least five EU Member States (*see separate article in this Mailout*). José Bové of the Confédération Paysanne has demanded that the 4,800 hectares concerned be destroyed, and that government revoke all current authorisations for GM maize. The government has, so far, only gone as far as announcing investigations and plans to identify precisely where the seed has been planted. But it is probably unlikely to react as firmly as in the contaminated oilseed rape case in light of the fact that some varieties of GM maize are authorised for cultivation, whereas oilseed rape is not. Several of the départements concerned, in the meantime, have also announced their own investigations. (GL)

GMO POLLUTION (3)

Contaminated 'healthy' honey found in Austria!

Global 2000/Friends of the Earth Austria has discovered that honey sold by a 'healthy' food chain is contaminated by varieties of genetically modified herbicide-tolerant Canadian oilseed rape.

Samples of the honey, marketed under the "Biophar" brand label, were sent to the Austrian federal environmental agency for testing. The results of the analyses proved "without doubt" that pollen from GM oilseed rape was present. The oilseed rape varieties in question have been genetically modified to be tolerant to two different herbicides: "Basta" (produced by Aventis) and "RoundUp" (produced by Monsanto).

The Biophar honey is labelled as being "Canadian rape/clover honey" and was being sold by major Austrian supermarkets and high street stores such as Interspar, Eurospar, Spar-Maerkten, Zielpunkt and Metro. The retailers concerned immediately removed the honey from their outlets.

Global 2000 is pointing out that Austrian consumers are unwittingly buying a product whose safety has not been demonstrated, and underlining that, to date, only GM soya and maize have been approved for food use in the EU under the Novel Food Regulation. Global 2000 is also warning the general public against any other products which may be of Canadian origin, since about half of all oilseed rape cultivated in Canada is genetically modified and other products, such as oils derived from oilseed rape, are probably contaminated as well. (GL)

GMO POLLUTION (4)

Contamination is inevitable at any distance

The UK government has finally admitted that 'buffer zones' around fields of GM crops are ineffective and that GM contamination is inevitable at any distance! In a response to a parliamentary question on 13th June, widely reported in the UK press, Environment Minister Michael Meacher confessed that "it would be false to pretend that any distance is going to prevent some contamination". "The question is how we can absolutely minimise that to a level which is acceptable to those buying the product, because it is they who buy the product which will have to determine what degree of GM in a non-GM food is acceptable to them", Mr. Meacher said.

The previous week, the government had announced that it was reviewing the separation distances between genetically modified and conventional crops, and that results of the review will be completed by 1st August. This announcement followed the revelation of the contaminated GM oilseed rape scandal (see separate article in this Mailout), and the discovery by Friends of the Earth, in May this year, of honey containing GM pollen,

The Soil Association, which awards licences to organic farmers and growers, has indicated that it believes that as many as 34 organic farms are at risk of contamination as a result of experimental farm-scale trials of GM crops being located in the vicinity. The Soil Association has told Environment Minister Michael Meacher that 'buffer zones' need to be increased up to 6 Kms (at present some of them are as little as 50 metres). Stories in the British press indicated that Meacher is urgently considering the situation and that the government may even order the destruction of several GM crop test sites which are too close to organic farms. (GL)

DOES EUROPE NEED A "GM-FREE" LABEL?

When the Novel Food Regulation went through the final stages of the legislative procedure at the end of 1996, the conciliation committee reached agreement on a recital stating that the regulation did not "prevent a supplier from informing the consumer on the labelling of a food or food ingredient that the product in question is not a novel food within the meaning of this Regulation, or that the techniques used to obtain novel foods indicated in Article 1 (2) were not used in the production of that food or food ingredient".

Since the labelling regime under the Novel Food Regulation was (1) far from being clear and (2) excluded food additives, aromas and extraction solvents from any labelling obligations, NGOs in several member states of the European Union started working on a voluntary GM-free labelling scheme. The rationale behind these initiatives was that since the obligatory labelling scheme for GM food under EU law was incomplete, the only way to address this problem at Member State level was to introduce voluntary GM-free labelling schemes. At-

tempts by Austria to extend the scope of the labelling obligations by national regulation to GM food additives were immediately stopped by the European Commission. However, although the efforts to establish GM-free labels (often also called "positive" labels) led relatively early to new regulations in Austria and Germany, the GM-free label was not very well received in either of these countries. That is still very much the situation - companies do not use these labels.

The Commission originally announced it would come up with a proposal for a voluntary GM-free label before the summer break, i.e. in August, and it's therefore time for NGOs to get ready in order to react in time to the Commission's proposal. It seems quite clear, however, that consumer as well as environmental NGOs object to the Commission's plan to introduce such a labelling scheme, whereas industry is currently desperately lobbying the European institutions in favour of the GM-free label. The NGOs' position is very clear: since - in contrast to the Member States -

the Commission actually has the legal competence, it should complete the existing labelling obligations and establish a comprehensive labelling scheme instead of introducing voluntary labelling schemes for unmanipulated foods.

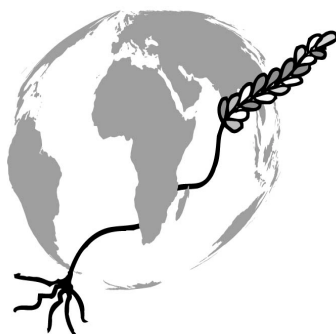
Actually, many NGOs might be in favour of a technology-based labelling scheme that would avoid the ridiculous testing currently used to identify GM food and which would, in fact, ensure segregation. Since this is exactly what industry wishes to prevent, it is lobbying in favour of the GM-free label. Once such a GM-free label regulation is adopted, it would be difficult for the Commission to justify any extension of the labelling obligations for GM food and industry could always refer to the GM-free label regulation. Thus, while the GM-free label may be an interesting instrument to show at Member State level how incomplete the EU labelling requirements are, a voluntary labelling scheme is not what the European Commission should waste its time and resources on. (DL)

CAN BIOTECHNOLOGY FEED THE WORLD?

FoE/Oxfam conference on "Sustainable Agriculture in the New Millennium - the Impact of Biotechnology on Developing Countries"

During recent months and years, agro-biotechnology - and more specifically those applications which involve genetic engineering - have increasingly been advertised by specific stakeholders and interest groups as the solution to overcome hunger, often as the only solution to feed the world. A conference organised by Friends of the Earth, Oxfam Solidarity and the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation at the end of May had the goal of addressing precisely this issue. In contrast to many other meetings, however, the conference "Sustainable Agriculture in the New Millennium - the Impact of Biotechnology on Developing Countries" aimed at comparing the solutions offered by biotechnology with other approaches and alternative solutions. The conference was attended by more than 300 participants and, in contrast to many other meetings, aimed at a debate between the different stakeholders and interest groups, rather than about them. The conference involved researchers and policy makers, the private as well as the public sector, NGOs as well as government representatives, and - most importantly - those who might be most affected by agro-biotechnology: the people and farmers of developing countries.

Many speakers and participants appreciated the variety of different people attending the conference. One participant said: "This is the first conference I have been



to where the Director General of an international agricultural research center, the President of the largest Farmers' Union in the world, a representative of the Third World Network and Monsanto were not only speaking, but were on the same panel". The people concerned on this first panel were Per Pinstrup-Andersen (Director General of the International Food Policy Research Institute, Washington DC), M.D. Nanjundaswamy, President of the Karnataka Farmers' Union, Chee Yoke Ling (Third World Network) and Kenyu Mbijwe, representative of Monsanto, Kenya. There seemed to be wide agreement among participants of the conference that it was useful to talk to each other, even though most did not expect consensus as a result of such talks.

While the first day of the conference focussed on the causes of hunger on the one hand, and the status of biotechnology on the other, the second day was devoted to the assessment of contributions biotechnology can make to food security, compared to other ap-

proaches and to the definition of research priorities. The third day of the conference addressed policy and legal questions, such as the issues of intellectual property rights and world trade law. However, even the three days of the conference did not allow enough time to cover every single issue worthy of being discussed in the debate about biotech and developing countries. For example, the issue of substitution was not addressed. Instead, the focus was clearly on agricultural production systems.

All the presentations will be published by the organisers in the form of Conference Proceedings by the end of this year.

The past is prologue?

The conference showed very clearly how differently the results of the Green Revolution are still assessed by the different players. While some believe that the Green Revolution is one of the (scientific) success stories of this century, others actually blame it for having contributed to genetic erosion and destroyed the very basis most farmers in developing countries are completely dependent on. It seems unlikely that consensus can ever be reached about the Green Revolution and yet a common assessment of that revolution would seem to be helpful, if not necessary, to assess the forthcoming revolution induced by genetic engineering.

"This is the first conference I have been to where the Director General of an international agricultural research centre, the President of the largest Farmers' Union in the world, a representative of the Third World Network and Monsanto were not only speaking, but were on the same panel"

Lack of specificity

While there are plenty of prejudices on all sides, the conference showed how little the different stakeholders know about each other's position and practical work. Moreover, the debate over biotechnology and developing countries still lacks specificity. Many focus on the technical possibilities to use this technology, whereas others focus on how this technology is going to be used given the current economic, social and political circumstances. Both perspectives are legitimate: the perspective "How agro-biotech could be used" is as legitimate as the perspective "How, in fact, it will be used". And we certainly need both perspectives. But it would surely also help the debate to specify the perspective when discussing the potential of agro-biotechnology to feed the world. The conference showed how difficult this still is.

Common grounds

The question of whether there is a need to look for common ground led to some heated debates during the conference. While some thought that the different stakeholders should identify common ground and come up with some sort of a minimum consensus, others took the view that no compromise could be reached with regard to genetic engineering. The debate is on and there is no end to it in sight. While those with the better arguments do not always get their way, it is nonetheless worthwhile to talk to each other and to make all efforts so that the better arguments are finally taken into account. (DL)

NEEM PATENT REVOKED!!!

Major victory against biopiracy

On 10th May, at the conclusion of a two-day Oral Proceeding, the Opposition Division of the European Patent Office (EPO) completely revoked Patent number 436257 which had been granted to the United States of America and the multinational corporation W.R. Grace for a fungicide derived from seeds of the Neem tree. The Legal Opposition to the patent had been lodged five years ago by the Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Natural Resource Policy directed by the renowned Indian scientist Vandana Shiva, IFOAM (International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements), and Magda Aelvoet, former Green Member of the European Parliament and current Environment Minister of Belgium. Following extensive testimony by expert witnesses, the panel judged that there was no inventive step involved in the claimed "invention."

The three Opponents in the case were extremely pleased with the outcome, but they had felt confident all along in the merits of their case. Dr. Vandana Shiva commented, "We were certain from the beginning that the US/Grace patent did not satisfy the basic requirements for a patent. How could the United States or W.R. Grace say they invented something which has been in public use for centuries?"

"This is a great day not only for us but for all people throughout the world, especially from the Third World, who have been fighting to take back control of their resources and knowledge systems

from the patent regimes of the North," said IFOAM President Linda Bullard. "We are gratified about the decision's recognition of the intellectual achievements of the South and urge the patent office to reject the 11 Neem patent applications which are still under examination. We hope that our victory will mark a turning point in the struggle against biopiracy".

At midday on the first day of the hearing demonstrators gathered in front of the EPO building holding banners reading "No Patents for Theft" and carrying signs representing all the European patents which have been granted or are pending on the Neem. A 2-metre tall Neem tree whose scientific name means the "Free Tree" was symbolically "freed" from patents for public use by a delegation of scientists and farmers from India and Sri Lanka. They then presented to a representative of the EPO packages of signatures of

500,000 Indian citizens demanding that all patents on the Neem be revoked.

(source: press release IFOAM. For a background paper on the Neem Patent Challenge, go to www.ifoam.org)



FRANCE UPHOLDS GMO MORATORIUM, HIGHLIGHTS TRACEABILITY AND LABELLING

According to a memorandum issued by the French authorities, labelling and traceability are the key issues to be addressed with regard to genetically modified organisms, in particular those which are used as food or food ingredients. Concerning labelling, the memorandum highlights the fact that existing Directives and Regulations for seeds, and other products derived from GMOs including food for human consumption and animal feed, "are difficult to apply and enforce and do not guarantee total transparency for either the consumer or operators". France therefore proposes the drafting of a cross-functional text - which would either be independent or an amendment to existing legislation (Directive 98/95, Directive 90/220, Regulation 258/97, Regulation 1139/98 and Regulation 49/2000) - "in order to specify, complete and align the different approaches used in the different Community texts in order to permit labelling of products containing GMOs or derived products".

On the question of traceability, the memorandum defines three objectives:

- improving the fairness of commercial transactions, and creat-

ing a vital tool for reliable consumer information;

- allowing the implementation of mechanisms to monitor the environmental impact of disseminating GMOs (the proposed revision of Directive 90/220/EEC, while calling for traceability and monitoring, falls short of laying down terms and conditions, the memo says);
- making it possible to monitor any unintentional consequences of GMO consumption on animal and human health, and even applying recall measures based on new scientific discoveries.

The French memorandum proposes the rapid development of "a cross-functional regulatory instrument laying down conditions on which registers must be kept and on which the presence of GMOs or products derived from GMOs must be mentioned in shipping documents". France further proposes the establishment of harmonised inspection and analysis procedures as a vital complement to ensure traceability.

The memorandum reinforces information received by Friends of the Earth/Amis de la Terre France

in the context of the revision of Directive 90/220/EEC, i.e. that the French government is prioritising the question of traceability of GMOs in all their forms - seeds, raw materials and transformed products. This position has been reinforced even further by the recent GMO-contaminated oilseed rape and maize scandals which have hit France. The French Ministry of Environment therefore favours the creation of public registers for GMOs but feels that the amendment foreseen in the revision of 90/220 which states that "the location of GMOs placed on the market" does not go far enough. France also believes that the issue of civil liability should be a focus on the conciliation discussions between Parliament and the Council since no-one is very satisfied with the amendment adopted by the EP.

The French attitude will be an important element of the 90/220 conciliation process as France takes up the EU's presidency on 1st July. Green Environment Minister Dominique Voynet has already indicated that she believes the GMO moratorium should be maintained until stricter rules are in place. (GL)

For more information, contact:

**FRIENDS OF THE EARTH
EUROPE
BIOTECHNOLOGY PROGRAMME
29, rue Blanche,
B-1060 Brussels,
Belgium,
T. 32-2-542.01.80,
F. 32-2-537.55.96,**

E-MAIL

biotechnology@foeeurope.org

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