

SOS-Save our Seeds

European Seed legislation threatens GMO free agriculture

If European governments do not act now, tomorrow, the entire European seed stock will be contaminated, legally, with genetically modified organisms (GMOs).

The European Commission proposes to allow a “little bit” of GM to contaminate conventional and organic seed. Seed contamination levels between 0.3 and 0.7 percent would not even need to be labelled. Genetically altered plants would be growing in all our fields without the farmers knowing or being able to prevent or control it.

Food and farming free of GMOs would become a thing of the past, even where no GM varieties are intentionally planted. The seemingly very low contamination levels would also incur enormous costs and incalculable risks.

Seed proliferates, it also forms the basis of the human food-chain. Virtually everything we eat stems, directly or indirectly, from seeds. Seed is one of humanity’s oldest common, cultural assets. Both our own food security and that of future generations depend on it.

Therefore, our seed stocks have to remain clean. Their safety and purity must not become the plaything of a handful of bio-technology companies.

European citizens and farmers demand Purity Law for seeds

From April this year new labelling regulations for GM food and animal feed will come into effect. Everything produced from GM ingredients will have to be labelled –much to the annoyance of the USA and the GM industry, who know that European consumers will not buy GM products. However, a labelling threshold level of 0.9% for “accidental or technically unavoidable” contamination in each individual ingredient, has been set in the legislation.

Now the EU Commission intends to introduce a further Directive, a contamination-threshold for seeds of between 0.3% and 0.7%, depending on the variety. The contamination of seed is, however, something completely different to traces of GM soya in emulsifiers used in chocolate or animal feed.

Seeds can reproduce and spread into the environment. One tomato seed will produce a plant with several kilos of tomatoes and such a plant can pollinate other plants. From 5000 tons of rape-seed planted annually 4 million tons of rape-seed are harvested. Rape-seed cross-fertilises readily with many naturally occurring wild relatives (cruciferous plants).

If the proposed GM seed Directive was adopted, European fields planted with unlabelled and supposedly GM free seed could soon be host to billions of genetically altered rape-seed and maize plants - against the wishes and without the knowledge of farmers and consumers.

Freedom of choice?

The proposed seed legislation would open a legal backdoor, through which the GM industry could force their products upon farmers and consumers, essentially eroding our freedom to choose. Consumers would be left with the choice between a little more or a little less GM in their food. Industry representatives claim that such contamination was, unfortunately, technically unavoidable, and completely harmless, anyway. Neither of these claims is true.

* Austria has had a Purity Law for Seed since 2001 which is adhered to, without any problems, even by GM companies such as Monsanto, Bayer, DuPont/Pioneer and Syngenta.

* In the USA the genetically altered maize "Starlink" had to be recalled from circulation in 2001 because it can cause allergies. The recall process, which to date, has still not been completely successful, has cost the company Aventis (now owned by Bayer) close to a billion dollars, despite

the US government buying up millions of dollars worth of contaminated seed.

The consequences:

Unnecessarily, the wishes of over 70% of European consumers and farmers - to eat food that is truly GM free and to practice agriculture without GMOs - would in effect be ignored.

Should a GMO prove to be damaging to health or the environment it would be practically impossible to completely withdraw it from circulation. All varieties that may have been contaminated would have to be found and destroyed.

Cross-fertilisation of genetically altered seeds with wild relatives in the environment would be impossible to control.

In future, farmers, food producers and retailers would have to test all of their products, to ascertain whether contamination from GMOs is below the 0.9% threshold. This would cost millions of Euro and would ultimately be paid for by farmers and consumers - a kind of unwilling GM subsidy.

The livelihoods and practices of organic farmers, whose basic principles forbid the use of GMOs, would be endangered.

Seed, probably humanity's oldest common heritage which for more than 8000 years has been handed from generation to generation, would become contaminated with the risky products of a few GM companies (Monsanto, Bayer, Syngenta, DuPont/Pioneer, DOW), everywhere.

It is still not too late . . .

Originally, the EU Commission had hoped to pass the seed contamination threshold legislation quickly and quietly, without public or even parliamentary participation. However, this plan came up against a wall of opposition: with a united petition "Save our Seeds", 300 European farmer's, consumer and environmental organisations, with a combined membership of over 25 million citizens and more than 200.000 individual signers, are calling for a Europe-wide Purity Law for seed. In addition, many member states and the European parliament raised objections to the decision-making process, causing the Commission to withdraw its proposals at the last minute. The intention is to present the proposal again this spring. In the meantime, regional governments and councils across Europe have voted to remain GM free, to protect consumer's and farming interests and to protect the natural environment from any unforeseen, unwanted consequences. National governments will be responsible for approving or rejecting the Directive. Several EU governments appear to be willing to give a nod of approval to a "little bit" of GM, overriding decisions made by lesser legislative

bodies and against the wishes of a substantial majority of their citizens.

A Purity Law (technically 0.1%) or a seed contamination Directive (0.3% to 0.7%) will ultimately be decided by the national governments of EU member states. First the proposal will be submitted by the Commission to a Standing Committee of member states authorities on GMOs. If the proposal is not approved by the Committee with a qualified majority (two thirds of 87 votes held by the 15 member states according to their size) it will be forwarded to the Council of Ministers. The ministers can then decide upon the Commission's proposal with the same qualified majority. Should the ministers not come to a decision within 90 days the Commission could then legally implement its original proposal.

Get active for clean seed!

Sign the Petition "Save our Seeds". Now online.

Distribute petition-forms, information and posters to people you know and at public events, in shops, restaurants, offices, waiting rooms, libraries etc.

Write to your national Ministries of Agriculture and Environment and demand a clear position on protecting the majority of citizens and the economy.

Write to the European Commissioner for Environment, Margot Wallström and protest against the proposed seed-contamination Directive

Demand from your representatives in both national and European parliaments that they represent your interests for GM free food, clean seeds and an unpolluted environment.

Demand from the food retail industry, and the makers of your favourite products, that they fully commit themselves to the introduction of a Purity Law for seeds. Ask them how they intend to keep their products free of GM in the future without such a law, and at what cost to whom.



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