Extrait du Coordination Européenne Via Campesina

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GMOs : The socio - economic impacts of contamination

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Description :

After the presentation of the Spanish case-studies in the European Parliament on the 24th of March by Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, CECU (consumer organisation) and COAG (member organisation of European Coordination Via Campesina) we present you our positioning paper.

Coordination Européenne Via Campesina

Public resistance - The long struggle against GMOS in Europe

In spite of the repeated rejections of European farmers and consumers who have consistently iterated their opposition to the introduction of GMOs in European fields and markets, the EU is still pushing them against European Food Soveriegnty, and GMO crops and foods are in our fields and shops. The struggle against GMOs continues.

It is clear that the push for GM technology in Europe is caused by the commitments made by the EU Commission to biotechnology industries and their political representatives in order to introduce GM crops in Europe.

GM seeds represent the last step in reducing the role of farmers from independent food producers to simple labourers, ignoring the value of traditional knowledge, the role of farmers in biodiversity and environmental protection and locking farmers into a system based on seed, fertiliser, agrochemical and energy inputs entirely dependent on and controlled by transnational corporations and a logic of profit.

The farmers of the European Coordination Via Campesina reject GM agriculture on all grounds, and most urgently for the threat it poses to the very model of agricultural and food production which is now urgently needed in order to protect the environment, biodiversity, European food sovereignty and rural livelihoods.

A crisis in EU authorisation procedures ?

In order to facilitate the introduction of GMOs in Europe, the European Commission has opted for a onedimensional approach based entirely on the scientific evaluations of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), and has failed to consult other bodies (national authorities, The European Group on Ethics and New Technologies...).

EFSA itself has failed to fulfil it's remit in significant areas of importance to EU citizens and member state's decisions1 [1] , and has had clear questions raised over it's impartiality - the example of Suzy Renckens, who left EFSA's GMO panel for a job working directly with the Swiss Biotech firm Syngenta is but one of many clear examples of this. [2]

It is unacceptable that the EU has been allowed to "push" through controversial products such as GMOs taking advantage of given loopholes in an otherwise clear regulatory framework in place to ensure due process. As such this threatens democratic process and transparency and lends credence to the assessment that EU policies are driven by corporate as opposed to citizen interests - threatening the faith of citizens in the EU. The recent authorization of the BASF AmFlora Potato by the Commission in spite of a simple majority opposition in the EU council is an example of this.

The eventual submission of the EU Commission to request Socio-Economic Impact studies of GMOS is an important step, as it means they have finally complied with EC Regulation 178/2002 : "It is recognised that scientific assessment alone cannot, in some cases provide all the information on which a risk management decision should be based, and that other factors relevant to the matter under consideration should legitimately be taken into account including societal, economic, traditional, ethical and environmental factors and the feasibility of controls" It should be noted that these "societal, economic, traditional, ethical and environmental factors" have never been properly taken into account by the EU Commission in the procedure for GM authorization in Europe.

The failure of the European Commission to take these other factors into account up until now throws into question it's competency in managing the risk of the introduction of GMOs into Europe. The clear questions raised from the

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socio-economic reports from farmer's and civil society organisations will require an in depth analysis of how EU institutions have functioned in Europe, and a deeper investigation into the corporate takeover of EU decision making.

Socio-economic impacts and their implications for EU policy making

The socio-economic reports provided by farmer's organisations and civil society organisations, most importantly from Spain (where the majority of currently authorized GMOs, maize varieties derived from the MON810 event, are cultivated) provide important insights to the practical impacts of this new technology on individuals and communities through eyes unclouded by the potential for scientific or financial advancement. The "domino effect" nature of many of these impacts should also send warning bells ringing in European institutions. The introduction of GMOs in delicately balanced rural social and economic systems can have unforeseen and long lasting consequences. Socioeconomic impacts give a first impression of the potential difficulties GMOs can cause in Europe, the long term effects of which are difficult to quantify. The introduction of GM technology on incomplete scientific analysis without consideration of other impacts is at best shortsighted and at worst irresponsible.

The Spanish Case studies - practical examples, real lives3 [3]

Direct economic impacts

There is clear evidence of direct negative economic impacts on farmers affected by GM contamination of their previously profitable productions, whether organic or conventional. Thus, farmers living in regions where GMOs are cultivated are in danger of considerable economic losses due to the loss of organic certification through contamination. There are clear examples of this across considerable distances, in spite of farmers changing sowing times in an attempt to avoid contamination, even if this results in reduced yields. Taking into account the average farm income in Spain is around Euros20,000 per annum, the economic losses incurred in these examples have the potential to drive the farms into bankruptcy. As said by Félix Ballarín a farmer in the study : "I am discouraged. I am not going to sow maize this year. I can take on a certain amount of risk on my capital, but not this much..."

Another farmer in the study was the victim of contamination from GM Maize grown in the region, in spite of his precautions in sowing his crop later in the year. The case of this farmer, Eduardo Campayo, has a clear further downstream effect on the finely balanced rural economy of the region : "[The contamination] generates huge economic loss - the economic capacity of several people and small businesses is based on the GM-free character of my grain. If my maize is contaminated again this year, I will not grow the crop next year. I am sorry for my buyers who more or less depend on me"

Economic damage is not restricted to organic farming. Farmers cultivating conventional maize for the gluten market have lost up to 18 euros a ton when their crop and or harvest have been contaminated by GM maize and have then been sold for animal feedstuffs given that no agro-food industries want to buy GM maize for gluten. (See COAG et al document quoted above).

Domino effects of contamination

The two case studies outlined above had clear and concrete subsequent impacts on the local economy. In particular the case of Eduardo Campayo, whose maize was sold primarily to just one customer - The Rincon del Segura Bakery. The Rincon del Segura bakery in Albacete was a success story in the rural economy, providing employment through the processing of locally produced organic grains into bread and other products, with sales of more than 1 million Euro in 2007.

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At the start of 2007, the business bought a consignment of maize from Eduardo Campayo, maize that had been sown and harvested in 2007 (see above). When the Rincón del Segura bakery bought the maize it had an up to date certificate of organic status. In March 2007, the Sohiscert certifier's annual inspection of the bakery detected contamination by transgenes in that same consignment of maize which effectively disqualified the bakery from selling any goods derived from maize throughout 2007.

Due to these events, the Rincon del Segura bakery :

" stopped sales of all products derived from the maize (flour and meal)

" informed its clients that, due to the results of analyses, these products would not be sold by them until they could guarantee raw materials free of any traces of GMOs

" Returned all the maize and maize products to the farmer, leaving the bakery's usual clients without supplies and causing considerable economic damage to the bakery (and the farmer) and loss of image with clients.

The contamination of the maize provided to the local enterprise led to subsequent knock-on losses of market share, continuity of production and commercial viability. It is important that the secondary effects of the primary impacts of GMOs (particularly through contamination) are also considered in Socio-Economic impact assessments.

Impacts and Conclusions

The study undertaken by civil society organisations both in France and Spain indicated some alarming tendencies in the socio-economic impacts of GM crops.

Lack of responsibility

" liability for contamination resting with the contaminated - in all cases where farmer's crops were contaminated leading to economic losses for the farmer, the liability rested not with the "polluter" but with the "polluted"

" lack of information regarding location of GM fields - lack of registration of GM crops in local and regional areas led to confusion over locations of GM fields. Governments do not have transparent or effective systems in place to identify where GM crops are being grown

" contamination of seeds sold by conventional seed companies (leading to crop contamination) - in one alarming example from Spain seeds purchased from a local supplier (and thought to be conventional) were in fact contaminated by transgenes.

" lack of possibility of insurance on non-GM crops for contamination

Loss of beneficial practices

" Loss of local organic production - in some areas of Spain it is becoming impossible to source locally grown organic maize for animal feeds or other uses, reducing the capacity of the rural economy to develop interdependence and economic development.

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"The loss of native seeds and varieties essential to maintaining local and regional biodiversity.

" Difficulties for seed growers and producers ; patenting of genetic parts of plants and varieties accelerates the concentration of companies in the seed industry, and the increased need for analysis and segregation of production makes the work of seed producers economically much more difficult.

" Possible disappearance of non-GM seeds from markets. This has occurred in many countries which have allowed GM seeds. In Europe most forecasts suggest that if no legal changes are introduced, a high percent of seeds will be GM in the future.

It seems clear from the socio-economic impact reports which have been developed over the last number of years that there are serious concerns over GM cultivation which go far beyond the scientific analysis up until now undertaken by EU institutions, which has itself often been insufficient and flawed.

GMOs are used by large companies to privatise seeds at the expense of the food sovereignty of peoples and rural communities throughout the world. Their goal is to control people's access to food. An increasing number of scientific studies prove that GMOs are harmful to health and the environment and that, by contaminating other crops, they endanger biodiversity. Co-existence between an agriculture with GMOs and GM-free agriculture is impossible. Introducing socio-economic information completes the picture regards the negative impacts of GMOs.

To this end the European Coordination Via Campesina is calling for a permanent ban on GMO cultivation and import in the European Union and supports the call for a similar ban worldwide.

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[1] See Greenpeace document : "EU GMO Environmental Risk Assessment needs reforming", September 2008

[2] See "Head of European Food Standards Agency GMO panel moves to Syngenta : Letter to Barroso" Jan 21st 2010 on www.corporateeurope.org

[3] The full study is attached to this article in english and spanish.

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