

Slow Food Movement

The Slow Food Movement was born in Italy in 1986 as an association concerned with traditional food, good wine and limited tourism. In 1989 it developed into an international movement, and today Slow Food has 70,000 members, half living in Italy and the rest in more than 40 other countries.

Over the last few years it has also grown in complexity and addressed more issues. Born as a movement for the “defense of the right of pleasure”, it began to consider all the implications of this concept. Pleasure means of course eating good and well-known food, whose origins and processing are identified. It also means having a glass of top quality wine, beer or other traditional local drink. Pleasure also means visiting areas whose rural landscapes reflect the stories and habits of the people living there, connected to their climate, religion, history and current events.

But pleasure is much more than all this. More importantly, pleasure has to be considered as everyone’s pleasure, and what is served at the table is just the peak of the iceberg. This consideration triggered the evolution of the Slow Food from a largely gastronomic movement to an eco-gastronomic one.

Food comes from the land, and those who eat must know that their enjoyment has been made possible by those who produced the food: farmers, producers, cooks. Because the pleasure of food must be shared, nobody can enjoy their food without thinking that this is a universal right, and that every kind of food, even the simplest, has a story to tell: the story of a place, a population, an identity.

Cinzia Scaffidi

France: Liberating Fields is First Aid

The Confédération Paysanne cut down GMO fields. A court in Orléans ruled the action legitimate.

The French farmers’ trade union Confédération Paysanne (CP) started fighting genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in 1997. CP members cut down a GMO rapeseed crop from a Monsanto corporation field for the first time in the Département of Isère. They justified their action saying that GMOs prevent farmers from continuing to use their own seed, thus ‘disowning’ them, and that GMOs pollute neighbouring fields and endanger biodiversity. The CP repeated these previously announced actions with an increasing number of partners, thus raising public awareness of the irreversibility of this technology. Several activists had to appear in court, among them famous rebel farmer José Bové. In November 2005 Monsanto had the CP bank accounts closed because of a ‘field liberation’ done back in 1998. In any case: the number of field tests declined.

During a big anti-globalisation meeting in Larzac in 2003, the ‘Volunteer Field Liberators’ were formed as a way for civil society to participate in the farmers’ struggle against GMOs. Following suspension of the European biotechnology moratorium in 2004, more than 5,000 ‘volunteers’ demanded to be convicted along with the accused field liberators on trial.

Two thousand GMO-free municipalities and 17 GMO-free regions in France felt that after the moratorium they were being prevented by the state from implementing their anti-GMO decisions. In January 2005, Greenpeace, CP, the Volunteer Field Liberators, environmental activists and political parties all protested against the unloading of a ship with GM soy in the harbour of Lorient. This action demonstrated that, through animal feed imports, GMOs are also entering the food chain in Europe – in milk, meat, eggs and fish – without labelling. In Autumn 2005 there were seven trials, and the judges listened very carefully to the testimonies of scientists and farmers. Their verdicts were much milder than the biotech lobby expected.

On November 9, 2005, the court of Orléans exonerated the field liberators, accepting their argument for their right to provide first aid to protect the environment from uncontrollable cross pollination. In summer 2005, seed growers had admitted planting 1,000 hectares of commercially approved GM maize. Their aim was to force a co-existence law as soon as possible. The French government announced a draft to implement the EU guideline 2001/ 18/CE; it is to be discussed in parliament in spring 2006. A broad coalition of non-governmental organisations, is, however, fighting ‘co-existence’, saying it cannot be put into practice. These groups demand that firms take responsibility for cases of genetic pollution. GMO seeds have to be labelled at the technical evidence limit, just like animal products, and regions should be able to keep the right to freedom from GMOs. In France too, public opinion is against GMOs – both in the fields and on the plate.

MICHEL DUPONT

German Regions Against Gene Technology

More than 23,000 farmers have in the past two years decided to produce GMO-free

The project ‘GMO-free Regions in Germany’ offers advice to initiatives and supports existing GMO-free regions with background information, events and consulting on current issues of gene technology. The project’s focus is on existing, nearly founded or planned GMO-free regions. We gladly support local activities or individuals that need help or information. What happens if the declaration of voluntary commitment runs out? Where can GMO-free animal feed be obtained? How is a GMO-free region founded? How can large natural protection areas support this movement? Our homepage www.gentechnikfreie-regionen.de provides answers to these questions and up-to-date information.

Since the first GMO-free region was founded in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania in November 2003, a lot has happened – not least thanks to the active involvement of many farmers. Some 22,100 farmers with 728,000 hectares of agricultural farmland have voluntarily committed themselves not to use gene technology, and have joined to form GMO-free regions. By early December 2005 there was a total of 84 GMO-free regions. Additionally, more than 1,000 farmers have declared that they work GMO-free on their farms. Together with GMO-free counties, national parks and forests this amounts to 1.5 million hectares of guaranteed GMO-free land.

In view of the current political discussion on a new gene technology law in favour of the industry, and the corporate announcement of a push for large-scale cultivation of GMO varieties, plus the first approval of insect-resistant BT maize MON 810 in Germany, the voluntary establishment of GMO-free regions is the most efficient way to maintain GMO-free agriculture and food protection on a mid to long-term basis.

The large competitive advantage of EU farmers serving the GMO-free market will be preserved and can even be extended. In the EU, more than two-thirds of consumers already reject GMOs in food production, and in the US the demand for GMO-free products is also on the rise. The opportunities for sales are increasing because manufacturers are more careful about where their goods come from. The Andechser dairy and the Upländer farmers’ dairy are trendsetters in food production, their milk ‘without GMO’ has clearly paved the way for quality production in the future. The project ‘GMO-free Regions in Germany’ is financed by the Federal Nature Conservation Agency (BfN). The project is supported by Friends of the Earth Germany (BUND), the Institute for Labour and Economy (IAW) and the organic farmers’ organisation Arbeitsgemeinschaft bäuerliche Landwirtschaft (AbL).

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