

Pure Soy from Brazil

GMO-free regions in Europe visiting Brazil urge safety standards against contamination of soybean imports. The amount of Brazilian GM-soy is growing fast.

Farmers and importers from Europe are increasingly worried about the purity of their animal feed imports. Because while genetically modified ingredients are still the exception in foodstuffs, feed for fattening animals often includes genetically engineered plants – like soybeans. This creates problems for organic farmers and GMO-free regions especially.

Brazil is the world's largest exporter of GMO-free soy for animal feed, but alongside their conventional soya, GMO-soya is also being grown – the estimated share of genetically modified soya plants in this year's harvest could top one-third. Means of preventing contamination of exported beans have been inadequate, as inquiries made by a recent 32 person delegation from the Network of GMO-free Regions revealed.

Altogether eleven regions from France, Italy, Spain and Greece took part in the October 2005 trip, organized by the regional council of Brittany. During their visit the delegation met with high-level representatives, among them Brazilian Environment Minister Marina Silva, Foreign Minister Luis Fernando Furlan as well as prominent gene-tech opponent Roberto Requião, Governor of the state of Paraná.

Paraná is Brazil's second largest grain exporter, with its largest grain exporting port, itself GMO-free. From there most Brazilian soybeans are shipped to Europe. And in the last harvest less than 0.3% of soya grown in Paraná was genetically modified.

The delegation, led by Pascale Loget from Brittany, expressed its concern about the growing presence of genetically engineered soya under production in Brazil, and made local authorities aware of the social and ecological consequences – and also of the marketing possibilities for GMO-free animal feed in Europe. Brazilian supporters of genetic engineering showed interest in European needs and explained that they would also offer GMO products if the demand were more clearly apparent. In addition they made it clear how important soy is for Brazil. It is the country's leading source of foreign exchange, and farmers growing genetically engineered soy have a cost advantage. The genetic engineering companies see Brazil as a strategic market, and Brazil's large growers are especially interested in genetically engineered soya varieties. Possible harmful effects are hardly considered, and there is in any case no information about the long-term effects on soils and development of possible resistance among wild plants (weeds).

The European delegation also met with employers' representatives from Paraná and Goiás, as well as with small farmers and the landless movement MST in Paraná, Mato Grosso do Sul and Goiás. As a first result, delegation members signed agreements with the state of Paraná, the employers' association from Goiás, associations of farmers in Paraná, Goiás and Mato Grosso do Sul as well as with the landless movement, to promote exchange of information and cooperation against GMO-contamination of soya. There is still a long way to go to reach a guaranteed GMO-free supply of soybeans, concluded the delegation from the Network of GMO-free Regions. The Brazilian Law on Biosafety still has a lot of loopholes, and is in no way adequate to ensure the co-existence between genetically modified and GMO-free production and delivery chains.

The trip was the second meeting after a visit from a delegation from Bretagne in 2004. In the coming months the European regions want to develop a strategy for a transatlantic cooperation. Following the discussions thus far, a global GMO-free soya market meeting European certification standards is definitely within reach. But there's still a lot to do. For the delegation the Brazilian visit was just a first step taken towards the right of the regions to determine their own agriculture.

Based on a report on the delegation by:

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China refuses to approve GMO rice

Transgenic plants came on the market illegally. Now officials are cautious.

At present genetically modified rice cannot be commercially grown in China. In late November 2005 the 74 experts on the Chinese Committee for Biosafety could not agree on approval for major agricultural plantings of transgenic rice. Additional data on the safety of transgenic varieties must be presented, the committee announced.

Applications for four different types of rice had been presented to the committee. One of these, Xa21-rice, had already received a recommendation from the committee the year before, and at that point the body had voted for its release. But their recommendation was not implemented by the authorities. One reason why, among others, was the growing public discussion about the health considerations of transgenic plants. This debate intensified after Greenpeace discovered in mid 2005 that genetically modified rice not yet approved for planting had long since been found in markets in several Chinese provinces.

Werner Lammert

Berlin Manifesto for GMO-free Regions and Biodiversity in Europe

Our Land, our Future, our Europe

The regions of Europe have the right to determine their own ways of farming, eating, producing and selling food and of protecting their environment and landscapes, their culture and heritage, their seed, their rural development, their economic future. This includes the right to decide about the use of genetically modified plants and animals in their agriculture and ecosystems.

Our choice

We all share the fundamental human right to choose what we eat. Choices about the use of reproductive material in a common environment cannot be made individually, as they affect all people sharing these commons. Decisions about the use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and the shape of our landscape should be made democratically in the regions and not be imposed by individual farmers, bureaucrats or companies. Decisions can be wrong and thus should be open for change and reversal.

Our seed

The local diversity of seeds and traditional varieties and their wild relatives is the foundation for a region's unique composition of taste and the heritage of a region and is the basis for further innovation and development of seed. Protecting and encouraging the conservation and breeding of native and adapted local varieties and the integrity of farm saved seed is an important duty and right of regional agricultural policy. As seeds reproduce there can be no thresholds for any unlabelled GM contamination of non-GM conventional, organic and traditional varieties.

Our agricultural diversity

Agri-Culture is an important part of our regional way of life. Socio-economic and cultural impacts must be taken into account when introducing agro-technologies such as GMO. Most European regions have made the promotion of sustainable and organic farming and regional marketing priorities for their rural development. Where the right to farm without GMOs and without undue changes to the local agricultural practice can not be guaranteed, the introduction of GMOs must be prevented.

Our natural biodiversity

The shape of Europe's environment and landscapes, including its protected areas, is the result of thousands of years of human cultivation. The enormous wealth of different landscapes, eco-systems and species must be protected by those who share this common heritage. Safeguarding our biodiversity from the spread and introgression of GM varieties is a conservation goal in itself.

Our safety and precaution

Science can be wrong, but GMOs cannot easily be recalled, if detrimental effects occur. Hence the regions have the right to follow the precautionary principle on GMO release.

Our food sovereignty and labels

Most Europeans don't want GM-food. To serve this demand is part of a region's food sovereignty and an important economic chance. Regional authorities must be able to protect quality labels, purity standards, organic production and designations of origin at competitive prices. This includes access to GMO free animal feed.

Our co-existence

In most cases and for most species there is no realistic chance for coexistence between GM and non-GM farming, just as there is none between silence and noise in a room. The highest standards of protection are required for local cultivars and their wild relatives. The level of protection and standards of co-existence, including their costs, must be assessed and decided upon locally and regionally. Fair and sustainable co-existence must prevail between neighbours and economic partners. It must not be forced upon their traditional practices and future development.

Our Europe

The diversity of regions shapes the identity of Europe. In a global economy we do need common European standards on food safety, transparency, liability, environmental and nature protection and market access. They should be designed to serve and not to suppress the local and regional self-determination of the people of Europe. We will defend these rights and duties and the beauties and joys of our regions throughout Europe.

www.gmo-free-regions.org