

## **Compensation claimed**

**Greek farmers sue the seed companies. Pioneer and Syngenta are responsible for genetic contamination.**

In the spring of 2004, Greek authorities discovered GMO-contaminated maize (corn) and cotton seed on the Greek market. In many cases, the contaminated maize seed had been sold to farmers without their knowledge and had already been sown in various small areas, mainly in northern Greece. According to official statements from the Ministry of Agriculture, the Greek government traced and destroyed 118 hectares of sown maize fields. The first incidents of seed contamination had already been revealed by Greenpeace in 2000, following testing of cotton seeds.

Two companies were liable for the GE maize contamination, Pioneer and Syngenta. Both firms offered the farmers compensation, provided they sign a contract. By signing, the farmers were bound not to oppose the company. If they did, they would have to return the amount paid in compensation. This compensation differed from farmer to farmer, from area to area and from company to company. In some cases, a company offered to cover the farmer's expenses up to that time. In other cases, they offered to cover a part of the lost profit or a part of the subsidy per hectare.

The General Confederation of the Greek Agrarian Association (GESASE) decided to support some farmers in a lawsuit against the companies. A few months later, in March 2005, GESASE announced at a press conference that they had filed a lawsuit against Syngenta on behalf of farmers who had cultivated GE-contaminated hybrid seeds. GESASE filed a second lawsuit against the Greek authorities, for allowing GE-contaminated seeds to enter the domestic market. Although the Hellenic Ministry of Agriculture has been conducting official controls on imported and domestic seedlots in order to eliminate cases of contamination since 2001, it was obvious that these controls did not prevent GE seed contamination.

The President of GESASE stated that they would continue their battle against GMOs, as the unique biodiversity of Greek agriculture is in danger and must be preserved. GESASE has acted in numerous previous cases to stop GMOs from entering Greek agriculture. In June 2005 GESASE announced support for another group of farmers against the company Pioneer HI-Bred, and a third lawsuit was filed. All the cases are scheduled to be heard in March 2006.

**Myrto Pispini**

## **Save our Seeds**

**GMO contamination of seeds is unacceptable.**

The international seed industry would like to introduce 'a little' genetic engineering into European fields, if not in great style, then at least in small doses. It also demands for non-genetically modified seed an allowable "threshold" for the "accidental or technically unavoidable existence" of genetically engineered seed. Such a limit was introduced years ago for food and animal feed: if the amount of GMO in an ingredient is greater than 0.9%, then a label is required.

This isn't the case with seeds, for good reason. Because they multiply by themselves, unlike chocolate, for instance. Thus even the smallest contamination can have major consequences. Above all, this back door would make effective control over the spread of genetically modified organisms practically impossible. Farmers wouldn't even know if genetically engineered plants were growing in their fields or not.

Despite this, the EU Commission has since 2001 planned a directive allowing up to 0.3% of GMO in conventional seed from maize or rapeseed. Further limits should follow. But after massive protest from more than 300 organizations with over 25 million members and 200,000 letters of opposition, the plan was withdrawn in late 2004. Since then silence and disagreement reign in Brussels. The new environment commissioner Stavros Dimas, earlier critical of genetic engineering, is in no hurry to move on the new proposal officially being worked on by the Commission. As long as he does nothing, there will be zero tolerance for GMOs in seedstock.

The European initiative “Save our Seeds” is following further developments with an eagle eye and demands the establishment of a purity regulation in seed legislation.

Benedikt Haerlin / [www.saveourseeds.org](http://www.saveourseeds.org)

## **GMO rapeseed makes organic farming impossible.**

**Rapeseeds cross-pollinates so easily that contamination of other fields is unavoidable. Canada is especially affected.**

Herbicide-resistant rapeseed (canola) is one of the most widely used genetically modified plants. It is the fourth most widely grown GM crop, after soya, maize and cotton, with more than four million hectares (10 million acres) under cultivation worldwide. However in recent years, in various parts of the world, GM herbicide-resistant rapeseed has proven to be virtually uncontrollable.

In Canada it is no longer possible to grow rapeseed organically, as the danger of contamination is too great. Transgenic varieties are now used in some 80 percent of rape fields and almost every rapeseed delivery there includes genetic contamination.

This has caused problems in other countries. For example, investigations around international Japanese ports that receive Canadian rapeseed found genetically-modified rapeseed plants growing wild. Eight of ten ports studied were affected. The research, carried out in 2004 by civil society groups, was confirmed by a government report in February 2005. According to the report transgenic rapeseed plants had spread out along streets and train tracks.

Cultivation in small areas can also cause contamination of conventional or organically grown rapeseed varieties. The Department of Primary Industries of the Australian state of Victoria confirmed in late October 2005 that contamination found in Australia was not due to imports, but occurred during in a bulking process in the federal state of Tasmania. The contamination was between 0.1 and .4 percent, thus under the new limit of 0.9 percent, enacted following discovery of the contamination. Estimates in the state of Western Australia assume that about a third of the rapeseed harvest there could be affected.

Christof Potthof

## **Soy out of control**

**No labels, no supervision. In Romania genetically modified soy is even in food – with no notice.**

About half of the 140,000 hectares of soya planted in Romania in 2005 are officially registered to be genetically engineered Roundup Ready soya produced by the US companies Monsanto and Pioneer. But according to farmers associations and even the ex-country manager of Monsanto in Romania, in reality up

to 90% of the soybeans are genetically engineered as farmers can save and exchange their own GE seeds. Nobody in Romania has control over the situation.

The first deliberate release of GE soya in the country took place in 1999 without any proper information about the true costs of this experiment for environment, consumers and farmers.

The Romanian legislation on GMOs is very weak and far away from implementing existing EU-standards. However, the responsible authorities not even have the means to implement and enforce the existing laws having no inspectors to control the situation and not a single certified testing laboratory.

An important factor for loosing control is the total lack of independent consultation and information of farmers to explain the specific uncertainties and risks of growing GE crops. In many cases farmers do not even seem to be aware that the crops they grow are genetically engineered. The companies neither informed them about the necessity of labelling and traceability, nor about potential environmental and economic risks.

Although GMOs are released massively into the environment and the food chain, the public is not informed about these releases or GMOs in the food they are eating. The national labelling law, which only refers to GE-soya, is not enforced. There is not a single labelled product on the market, though massive amounts of GE soya are being used in domestic food production.

Due to the absence of control measures, such as testing, labelling, monitoring and traceability infrastructure, Romania is unable to harmonize with the EU-laws and requirements. Its agricultural exports and food products may well be banned from EU markets altogether as they do not meet the EU-standards of labelling and traceability. In addition, GE products certainly do not meet the demands of consumers in Europe. Thus, Romanian farmers and food industry may well face closed doors to the EU market even after the countries accession to the Community.

In addition, while the use of Roundup Ready soya for food and feed imports is approved within the EU, there is no approval for cultivating these GMOs. Only a month ago Monsanto for the first time applied for an approval of cultivating their GE soybeans in Brussels. In Brazil, where GE soybeans had been smuggled in from Argentina even though their cultivation was banned, the government finally gave in and approved the cultivation to regain at least some control over the situation. However, whether the EU is prepared to give in to such a blackmailing strategy by Monsanto and approve GE soybean cultivation before Romania's accession in 2007 remains to be seen.

The previous Romanian government did not consider GMOs to be an important issue during the accession negotiations between March 2002 and December 2004 and did not include any derogation or transition periods. It simply proposed that the country would "grow GMOs and enforce the precautionary principle".

The cultivation of GE crops in Romania threatens biodiversity and the potential for organic farming. Romania is becoming Europe's Argentina. The widespread use of herbicides, like Monsanto's Roundup will destroy the rich biodiversity of the regions, create problems of herbicide-resistant weeds and subsequently increase the use of herbicides, as experienced in countries like USA and Argentina. The problem of illegal growing and contamination endangers not only Romania's potential for eco-tourism but also the livelihoods of the increasing number of organic farmers.

**Gabriel Paun**