



**Friends of  
the Earth  
Europe**

Media Briefing - 13 September 2006

## **Friends of the Earth Europe's position on the Hungarian moratorium on GMO Maize MON810**

Helen Holder, GM Campaigner at Friends of the Earth Europe: *"It is outrageous that the European Commission should bully Hungary into dropping its ban of a genetically modified maize. This maize is designed to produce a toxin, which may well have detrimental effects on the environment. Hungary is well within its rights to act with caution and ban it at this stage."*

On Monday 18<sup>th</sup> September, representatives from all 25 EU member states will vote whether to force Hungary to lift its moratorium on the genetically modified (GM) maize MON810. This vote will take place during a meeting of the 2001/18 Regulatory Committee.

Due to safety concerns, Hungary prohibited the import of Monsanto's MON810 maize seeds on January 20<sup>th</sup> 2005 and also banned the production, use and sale of the maize within the country.

Friends of the Earth (FoEE) supports the right of Hungary to maintain this ban and opposes the European Commission's proposal to lift it. Indeed, Hungary actually has a legal right under EU Directive 2001/18 to ban the GM maize.

Friends of the Earth Europe, with Greenpeace, has written to the national governments of all EU member states and also to their permanent representations in Brussels, urging them to support the position of Hungarian government by voting against lifting the ban. Friends of the Earth Europe has also written to the European Commission, calling that the issue of the Hungarian MON810 ban should be removed from the agenda of Monday's committee meeting. The letters can be accessed at <http://www.foeeurope.org/GMOs/HUbanletterFINAL.pdf> and <http://www.foeeurope.org/GMOs/HUbanletterECFINAL.pdf>

### **Why should Hungary be allowed to maintain its moratorium?**

Monsanto's MON810 maize is a particular type of crop called a "Bt crop", which is genetically designed to produce a toxin that kills pests - *Bacillus thuringiensis*. Many uncertainties remain about these Bt crops - even the European Commission has admitted that *"it is a reasonable and lawful position that no Bt crops should be planted until all the effects on the soil are known."* [1]

#### **1. MON810 authorisation ignores specific aspects of Hungarian ecosystems**

The existing risk assessment for MON810 cannot be considered valid for Hungary: At the time of the original approval for MON 810, Hungary was not yet a member of the European Union. The environmental risk assessment that served as a basis for the permission to place this maize on the market was only done on the territory of the EU-15 member states. Hungary was therefore not included. This is significant because Hungarian ecosystems are part of the Pannonian biogeographical region, which has different environmental characteristics than the ecosystems in the EU-15 member states.

#### **2. Hungary's seed industry is vital to its economy**

Genetic pollution is difficult to contain, as increasing cases of seed, crops and food contamination – most recently with GM rice – show. Hungary is one of the EU's leading seed

producers for maize and it is therefore vital for it to be able to produce uncontaminated seed stocks if freedom of choice for farmers and consumers is to be ensured.

3. New scientific evidence hasn't been taken into account

Since the original risk assessment of MON 810 in 1998, a host of new studies on Bt maize have shown potentially damaging results, such as:

- Fields in which Bt maize is grown contain fewer beneficial insects. [2]
- The toxin produced by Bt maize has been shown to persist in soil, and could be harmful to soil organisms (such as earthworms) that play an important role in soil health. [3]

Also, at the request of the European Commission, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) is currently examining the effects of Bt crop on non-target organisms. This work should be completed before lifting the Hungarian ban is even considered.

4. The European Commission itself has acknowledged that there are many unanswered questions about genetically modified crops

The Commission admits that there are "large areas of uncertainty" and that "some issues have not yet been studied at all".

[http://www.foeeurope.org/publications/2006/hidden\\_uncertainties.pdf](http://www.foeeurope.org/publications/2006/hidden_uncertainties.pdf)

5. The authorization of MON 810 is based on outdated legislation.

The permission for MON 810 to be placed on the market was given in 1998, under the old EU Directive 90/220. Under this Directive there was no obligation to carry out a thorough environmental risk assessment. The new EU Directive 2001/18 demands a risk assessment that includes looking at long-term and indirect effects of growing GMOs. However, MON 810 has not yet been reassessed under the new Directive (see also point 6, below).

6. MON810 up for review in 2007: decision should be delayed until then

In 2007 there will be a reassessment of the EU authorization for the growing of MON 810. This reassessment will take place under EU Directive 2001/18. It is likely that MON 810 will not meet the stricter environmental impact assessment requirements of the Directive 2001/18, especially with regard to cultivation.

7. Real reform of EFSA is needed before a decision

The Commission proposed that Hungary's moratorium on MON810 maize should be lifted on the basis of an Opinion from EFSA. But both the Council and Commission College levels have recently questioned EFSA's failure to take long term environmental impacts of GM crops into account. EFSA's Opinions should be given due weight only after a real reform has taken place.

8. Analysis of the Hungarian government's response to EFSA is necessary

Only this week, the Hungarian Government submitted their official response to EFSA's Opinion on Hungary's use of the safeguard clause. This should be examined in detail before proceeding further.

**For more information, please contact:**

**Helen Holder**, GM Campaigner at Friends of the Earth Europe

Tel: 32 25 42 01 82, Mobile: 32 474 857638, Email: [helen.holder@foeeurope.org](mailto:helen.holder@foeeurope.org)

**Robert Fidrich**, GM Campaigner at MTVSZ/Friends of the Earth Hungary

Tel: 36 1 216 7297, Mobile: 36 670 271 5715, Email: [fidusz@mtvsz.hu](mailto:fidusz@mtvsz.hu)

**Rosemary Hall**, Communications Officer at Friends of the Earth Europe

Tel: 32 25 42 6105, Mobile: 32 485 930515, Email: [rosemary.hall@foeeurope.org](mailto:rosemary.hall@foeeurope.org)

References:

[1] see: [http://www.foeeurope.org/biteback/EC\\_case.htm](http://www.foeeurope.org/biteback/EC_case.htm)

[2] Andow, D.A. and Hilbeck, A. 2004. Science-based risk-assessment for non-target effects of transgenic crops. *Bioscience* 54: 637-649

[3] Stotzky, G. 2004. Persistence and biological activity in soil of the insecticidal proteins from *Bacillus Thuringiensis*, especially from transgenic plants. *Plant and Soil* 266:77-89