

Concluding speech

(Benny Haerlin)

We, participants of the 5th European Conference of GMO Free Regions call upon the member States of the European Union to rethink their legislation and policy on the use of genetically engineered organisms in agriculture. A majority of citizens opposes the use of GMOs in agriculture and food. In the larger part of Europe regional and local governments, as well as farmers have declared their territories gmo free. The only GMO presently approved for cultivation, Monsanto's Mon810 maize, is formally banned in six member states and factually prohibited from planting in two more states. This maize variety is cultivated on less than 0,1% of the area dedicated to maize cultivation in but 7 member states and no other European countries. Of these 100.000 hectares, 75% are planted in a single country, Spain. However, millions from taxpayers money are spent on the introduction and promotion of GMOs. Thousands of farmers are threatened by unwanted contamination with genetically engineered traits, controls for labeling and identity preservation absorb resources in utter disproportion to the claimed benefits of these GMOs. Finally hundreds of millions from public funds are spent on genetic engineering research and development as well as propaganda for a technology, for which taxpayers have clearly indicated that they are opposed to its use and have no need for their products. While the European Food Safety Authority is unable to present the required scientific re-evaluation of the long expired approval of Mon810 the European Commission tries over and again to overrule the national bans of this GMO, claiming there was no evidence that this product might be unsafe, only to be overruled by bold two thirds majority votes in the Council of Ministers.

In December 2008 the Council of Ministers had unanimously agreed that the present legislation on GMOs requires a thorough revision with respect to risk assessment and should also take into account socio-economic aspects. There was also agreement that the present procedures of imposing the cultivation of GMOs upon regions and nations is untenable. The Commission so far has not taken any steps to react to the Council's unanimous demands.

We call upon the governments of the European Union to put a halt to this farce and to impose a moratorium on any further approvals of GMOs until regulations are established that console these contradictions and that pay due respect to the will of the people of Europe.

In addition to a credible, unbiased and precautionary assessment of the potential risks of GMOs to the environment and human health, an assessment of the socio-economic impacts of cultivation of GMOs and their impact on the agricultural practices and policies should be taken in due account. Furthermore, EU approvals should no longer constitute an obligation to accept GMO cultivation. Regions must have the right to determine the best agricultural practice and decide for themselves whether to allow the introduction of GMOs in their agriculture and food systems.

Whereas elections to the European Parliament will be held in June we ask all candidates what their position is

- on the introduction of GMOs into European agriculture and food,
- on our demand for a moratorium on the cultivation of GMOs in Europe
- on regional selfdetermination and food sovereignty

- on patents on life, on plants, animals and even human genes
- on the purity of conventional seeds from GMO contamination

We call upon agro-chemical multinationals Syngenta, Monsanto, Bayer, BASF, DuPont and others to no longer abuse the scandal of increasing hunger in a world of overproduction to defend the introduction of GMOs. We consider such misleading propaganda, which is belied by all practical experience, as unethical and intolerable. We also call upon them to refrain from patent claims on traits of plants and animals, especially those which might be of special importance to address the impacts of climate change. We believe that the control of a few multinationals over the heritage of seed and agricultural diversity poses a threat to its further preservation and improvement and call for political action to stop and revert this trend.

We send our special greetings to

- The region of Bavaria, which has played an important role in the German and European debate on GMOs recently. We would appreciate the Free State of Bavaria to join the Network of GMO free regional governments.
- The regions of Poland, which have declared themselves GMO free and appeal to the Polish government not to tolerate the unregulated and illegal planting of Mon810 in its country.
- The 8 regional governments and 94 municipalities of Spain, who have declared themselves GMO free and appeal to the Spanish government to rethink its unique pro-GMO policy in the light of increasing public resistance.
- The small farmers of Mexico, who have maintained for so many generations the heritage of maize and appeal to the Mexican government not to allow GM maize cultivation and thereby threaten GM contamination of the unique Centre of origin of one of the worlds most important staple crops
- To the people, cantons and the government of Switzerland who have shown with their GMO moratorium to the rest of Europe how truly democratic and wise decision making based upon the vote of the people can prevent unnecessary risks to the environment and health as well as threats to traditional farming and agri-ecological innovation.
- To Professor Arpad Pusztai, who is in hospital these days: Arpad we all owe you so much for your scientific integrity and courage – please stay with us!

The resistance to the cultivation of GMOs in Europe, which is represented by thousands of GMO free regions, provinces, municipalities and farmers associations, has been steadily growing now for ten years. It unites people from all realms of society and from all political and social movements and parties. It gives pride to regions, as it expresses their will to defend their food sovereignty well beyond the critical aspects of a single technology.

In times of environmental, social and economic crisis regional self-determination and democratic defense of our ways of life, our food and agricultural diversity is a sign of hope: We will not surrender to global monocultures and we will do our best to address the enormous global and local challenges ahead.