

EU SUPPRESSES STUDY SHOWING GENETICALLY ENGINEERED CROPS ADD HIGH COSTS FOR ALL FARMERS AND THREATEN ORGANIC

Greenpeace press release, 16 May 2002

Brussels - A secret EU study leaked to Greenpeace states that all farmers would face high additional, in some cases unsustainable costs of production if genetically engineered (GE) crops were commercially grown in a large scale in Europe. The study predicts that the situation would become particularly critical for organic farming of oilseed rape as well as for intensive production of conventional maize.

The EU Commission ordered the study on the co-existence of GE and non-GE crops in May 2000 from the Institute for Prospective Technological Studies, of the EU Joint Research Centre. The study was delivered to the EU Commission in January 2002 with the recommendation that it not be made public.(1)

"The European Commission has tried to keep this study secret", said Lorenzo Consoli, Greenpeace EU policy advisor, "because it was afraid of its political implications. The question is, if the introduction of GE crops on a commercial scale in Europe increases costs of production for all farmers, makes them more dependent on the big seed companies, and require complicated and costly measures to avoid contamination, why should we accept GE cultivation in the first place?" The EU study states that in oilseed rape production the co-existence of GE and non-GE crops in a same region, even when "technically possible", would be "economically difficult" because of the additional costs and complexity of changes required in farming practices in order to avoid genetic contamination. Both organic and conventional farmers "would probably be forced to stop saving seed and instead buy certified seed", because of the increased risk of GE impurity for seeds that have been exposed to field contamination. The study predicts that smaller farms would face relatively higher costs compared to larger entities, and that cultivation of GE and non-GE crops in the same farm "might be an unrealistic scenario, even for larger farms".

The main specific findings of the report were:

- Commercialisation of GE oilseed rape and maize and to a lesser extent potatoes will increase costs of farming for conventional and organic farmers at a range between 10 and 41 per cent of farm prices for oilseed rape and between one and nine percent for maize and potatoes.
- Coexistence of GE farming and organic farming would be actually impossible in many cases.
- Generally, coexistence would only be possible with massive changes in farming practices, especially for conventional farmers; it would also require co-operation between farmers in a region and the willingness of all farmers concerned to participate in such co-operation; it is not clear who would implement these changes, who would be responsible for controlling their correct implementation, who would shoulder their costs.
- Seed and crop purity from GE at a detection level of 0.1 percent would be virtually impossible in most cases, i.e. all products and seeds of oilseed rape and maize would be contaminated with GE to a certain extent.

The study, based on a combination of computer modelling and expert opinion, analysed the consequences of an increase in the share of GE crops. It focused on the three crops of which GE varieties are currently available: oilseed rape for seed production, maize for feed production and potatoes for consumption. The study covered several farm types, both organic and conventional farming. It also considered three different threshold levels for genetic contamination: 0.1 percent (analytical detection level) for all the three crops, 0.3 percent for oilseed rape and 1 percent for maize and potatoes.

Notes:

(1) In a letter to the Commission accompanying the study, the Director General of the EU Joint Research Centre, Barry McSweeney, suggests that "(...) given the sensitivity of the issue, I would suggest that the report be kept for internal use within the Commission only."

For further information please contact:

Lorenzo Consoli, Greenpeace EU Advisor on GMO, mobile: +32496122112; Teresa Merilainen, Greenpeace International Press Office, Tel: +31 20 523 6637

A copy of the executive summary and conclusions of the study available at http://www.greenpeace.org/%7Eegeneng/reports/eu_ge_coexist.pdf or from Greenpeace European Unit, Lorenzo Consoli, mobile: +32496122112

EU: GENETICALLY ENGINEERED CROPS RAISE COSTS, SAYS SUPPRESSED STUDY

Environment News Service, May 21st, 2002.

BRUSSELS, Belgium -- Farmers would face higher, and in some cases unsustainable, production costs if genetically engineered crops were commercially grown on a large scale basis in Europe, according to a secret European Union study leaked to Greenpeace.

The study, "Co-existence in European Agriculture," predicts that the situation would become critical for organic farming of staple foods such as oilseed rape as well as for intensive production of potatoes and conventional maize, or corn.

The coexistence of genetically engineered farming and organic farming would become impossible in many cases since all seeds would be contaminated with genetically engineered traits to some extent, the study concludes.

Commercialization of genetically engineered oilseed rape, maize and potatoes would increase costs of farming to between nine and 41 percent, the study says. The increased cost of agricultural production generally leads to increased cost of foods in the marketplace.

The European Commission ordered the study on the co-existence of genetically engineered (GE) and non-GE crops in May 2000 from the Institute for Prospective Technological Studies, of the European Union Joint Research Centre.

According to Greenpeace, which for years has demonstrated against genetically engineered crops, the study was delivered to the European Commission in January 2002.

Within the study was a letter to the Commission from the Director General of the EU Joint Research Centre, Barry McSweeney, stating that "given the sensitivity of the issue, I would suggest that the report be kept for internal use within the Commission only."

Greenpeace released the leaked document on May 16.

In response to the report, Lorenzo Consoli, Greenpeace EU policy advisor said, "The European Commission has tried to keep this study secret. If the introduction of GE crops on a commercial scale in Europe increases costs of production for all farmers, makes them more dependent on the big seed companies, and would require complicated and costly measures to avoid contamination, why should we accept GE cultivation in the first place?"

The study, based on a combination of computer modeling and expert opinion, analyzed the consequences of an increase in the share of GE crops.

It focused on the three crops of which GE varieties are currently available: winter oilseed rape for seed production now being grown in France and Germany, grain maize for feed production in Italy and France, and potatoes for direct consumption and food processing in the UK and Germany.

The study covered several farm types, both organic and conventional farming. It considered three different threshold levels for genetic contamination: 0.1 percent, the analytical detection level for all the crops, 0.3 percent for oilseed rape, and one percent for maize and potatoes.

Greenpeace representatives say the study means that both organic and conventional farmers could be forced to stop saving seed and instead buy certified seed, because of the increased risk of GE impurity for seeds that have been exposed to field contamination.

Smaller farms would face relatively higher costs compared to larger entities, and cultivation of GE and non-GE crops in the same farm might be an unrealistic scenario, even for larger farms, the study acknowledges.

Established in Seville, Spain in 1994, the Institute for Prospective Technological Studies (IPTS) is one of seven institutes making up the Joint Research Centre. The task of the IPTS is to monitor developments in science and technology, to analyze their impact on Europe and the world, and to share these findings with European decision makers.

SUPPRESSED EC STUDY SHOWS GE CROPS WILL BE COSTLY FOR ALL

Third World Network press release, Geneva, 16 May 2002 (Kanaga Raja)

All farmers would face high additional, and in some cases unsustainable, costs of production if genetically engineered (GE) crops are commercially grown on a large scale in Europe, according to a study prepared for the Commission of the European Union, but which has not been made public, according to the international NGO, Greenpeace.

The secret study, which Greenpeace says, has been leaked to it, predicts that the situation would become particularly critical for organic farming of the rape oilseed as well as for intensive production of conventional maize.

The EU Commission ordered the study on the co-existence of GE and non-GE crops in May 2000 from the Institute for Prospective Technological Studies, of the EU Joint Research Centre.

The study was delivered to the EU Commission in January 2002 with the recommendation that it should not be made public, according to Greenpeace.

In forwarding the study to the EU Commission, the Director-General of the EU Joint Research Centre, Barry McSweeney, has suggested in his letter that "() given the sensitivity of the issue, I would suggest that the report be kept for internal use within the Commission only."

"The European Commission has tried to keep this study secret", said Lorenzo Consoli, Greenpeace EU policy advisor, "because it was afraid of its political implications. The question is, if the introduction of GE crops on a commercial scale in Europe increases costs of production for all farmers, makes them more dependent from the big seed companies, and requires complicated and costly measures to avoid contamination, why should we accept GE cultivation in the first place?"

The EU study states that in oilseed rape production, the co-existence of GE and non-GE crops in a same region, even when "technically possible", would be "economically difficult" because of the additional costs and complexity of changes required in farming practices in order to avoid genetic contamination. Both, organic and conventional farmers, "would probably be forced to stop saving seed and instead buy certified seed", because of the increased risk of GE impurity for seeds that have been exposed to field contamination. The study predicts that smaller farms would face relatively higher costs compared to larger entities, and that cultivation of GE and non-GE crops in the same farm "might be an unrealistic scenario, even for larger farms".

The main specific findings of the report were:

- Commercialisation of GE oilseed rape and maize and to a lesser extent potatoes will increase costs of farming for conventional and organic farmers at a range between 10 and 41 per cent of farm prices for oilseed rape and between 1 and 9 per cent for maize and potatoes;
- Coexistence of GE farming and organic farming would be actually impossible in many cases;
- Generally, coexistence would only be possible with massive changes in farming practices, especially for conventional farmers;

It would also require co-operation between farmers in a region and the willingness of all farmers concerned to participate in such co-operation. It is not clear who would implement these changes, who would be responsible for controlling their correct implementation, and who would shoulder their costs.

- Seed and crop purity from GE at a detection level of 0,1% would be virtually impossible in most cases, i.e. all products and seeds of oilseed rape and maize would be contaminated with GE to a certain extent.

The study, based on a combination of computer modelling and expert opinion, analysed the consequences of an increase in share of GE crops.

It focused on the three crops for which GE varieties are currently available:

oilseed rape for seed production, maize for feed production and potatoes for consumption. The study covered several farm types, both organic and conventional farming. It also considered three different threshold levels for genetic contamination: 0,1% (analytical detection level) for all the three crops, 0,3 % for oilseed rape and 1% for maize and potatoes.

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Meanwhile, in a column in the English newspaper Guardian (Tuesday, 14 May) under the title 'The fake Persuaders,' George Monbiot, has brought out how the powerful global corporate interests, the Monsanto Corporation in this case, has used a PR company which without full disclosures, managed to start a 'discourse' via a bio-list server to discredit the research work of two researchers at the University of California, Berkeley, that showed that native maize in Mexico had been contaminated across vast distances by pollen from GM (genetically modified) maize.

Monbiot has cited two journalists, Jonathan Mathews and free lance journalist Andy Rowell about how a PR firm contracted by Monsanto to play a crucial but invisible role in shaping a scientific discourse, got one going to discredit the study, to the point when the prestigious magazine, Nature which had originally published the study, retracted the study after publication.

Via a bio-technology list server (AgBioWorld) used by scientists, a message questioning the methodology and conclusions was started by a correspondent 'Mary Murphy' arguing that one of the researchers, Igancio Chapela, was on the board of the Pesticide Action Network and thus biased. This was followed up by a message by 'Andura Smetacek' asking questions about the payments received by Chapela for speaking engagements, and that the paper had not been peer reviewed.

Monbiot, after investigations, traced the identity of Mary Murphy to 'Bivwood.com', a property of Bivings Woodell, a part of the Bivings Group, a PR firm. Monbiot's letter to 'Mary Murphy' and asking her whether she was employed by Bivings and whether it was her real name, brought an answer "I can see by your articles that you have made up your mind about bio-tech".

Monsanto and its subsidiaries have been trying to persuade Mexico, Brazil and the EU to lift their embargoes on GM crops, and the research study about pollution of normal crops by pollen from GE crops carried over long distances would raise alarms and show the dangers of 'pollution', and the difficulties of isolating the cultivation of the two varieties.

The use of genetically engineered cotton crops have been allowed in India, in the state of Gujarat (run by the Bharatiya Janata Party government) in a process that has now been challenged by local civil society, development and environment groups.