

CPE

Coordination Paysanne Européenne
European Farmers Coordination



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save our seeds

22 April 2008

Dear MEP,

REF: EP Plenary Session April 23rd

Oral question: Zero tolerance regime for unauthorised GMOs and economic consequences thereof

We represent sustainable family farmers, consumer cooperatives, the organic sector and environmental NGOs from across Europe. We are writing to you concerning the oral questions, tabled by Neil Parish MEP, on the economic consequences of the EU's zero tolerance regime for unauthorised GMOs. These are due to be debated on Wednesday evening at the Strasbourg plenary. The timing of these questions coincides with high levels of media and political interest in rising food and feed prices around the world. They also follow a DG Agriculture report¹ on the potential impact of the EU's GMO regime on the availability and price of animal feed.

In the Annex (attached), we have addressed the four specific questions to be answered by the European Commission this Wednesday.

The increase in prices is a serious problem and solutions are needed urgently, but this must not be linked to unrelated issues in an attempt to force more genetically modified crops into the EU. We represent farmers and livestock breeders from around Europe who are confronted with this problem on a daily basis. We urge Members of the European Parliament to ensure that real solutions and support for farmers be investigated and implemented.

It is widely acknowledged, including by the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) that the primary causes of food and feed price increases are:

- the overall increased demand
- poor weather conditions
- the rapid expansion of agrofuels (also known as biofuels),
- the gradual deregulation of the markets over the last 20 years, and
- financial speculation.

¹ DG Agriculture Report. *Economic Impact of unapproved GMOs on EU Feed Imports and Livestock*, June 2007: http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/envir/gmo/economic_impactGMOs_en.pdf

There is little evidence to suggest that weakening the GMO regime in Europe will address this. Price increases have occurred all over the world – even in the US which has the most permissive system of GM approvals.

The roles of emerging economies, such as China, are being put forward as a reason for the EU to authorise more GMOs into the EU. Two main threats are being given for this: increased demand and the Chinese lack of awareness or lack of concern concerning GM crops.

It should however be noted that:

- Although demand in China is increasing, the FAO confirms that the EU will remain the largest single market for soybean meal for feed.
- Secondly, China has biosafety laws in place and is much closer to the EU system in this respect than it is to the US. Concerning consumer demand, the food company Kraft, for example, has adopted a GMO-free policy for its food products on the Chinese market.

The EU, one of the world's biggest trading blocks, carries weight in the international arena and can help determine what exporting countries cultivate, including whether they go ahead with new GMOs. Argentina and Brazil are indeed cautious about approving new GM crops that could hurt their exports to the EU and we would strongly urge Member States and the European Commission to continue to push for producer countries to cultivate animal feeds that correspond to what consumers want to eat. One million European citizens signed a petition² in 2007 calling for the labelling of meat and dairy products from animal fed with GM crops.

On average more than half of the European public is opposed to the use of genetically modified organisms, and many EU countries in fact have higher levels of concern, reaching up to the 70-80% mark³. We urge you to:

- work at the EU level to develop plant protein crops in Europe with a view to becoming less dependent on animal feed imports which would be the solution to getting real GM-free animal products, in line with the wishes of the majority of consumers, and
- ensure that the EU resists pressures to weaken its GMO regulations and instead promotes and defends high health and safety standards for consumers, animals and the environment around the world.

Yours sincerely,

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Mauro Albrizio, European Environmental Bureau (EEB)

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² <http://www.greenpeace.org/eu-unit/press-centre/press-releases2/one-million-petition>

³ http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_295_en.pdf, Eurobarometer, March 2008.

Who we are

Coordination Paysanne Européenne (CPE) is a coordinated group of 25 farmer's organisations from 15 countries in Europe. For 20 years we have produced analysis and proposals regarding reforms to the CAP. We are active in 15 countries and at EU level to defend the interests of small farms. With others, in 1993, we founded the international farmers and agricultural workers movement known as "la Via Campesina". CPE has been campaigning against GMOs for 15 years and also for greater autonomy within the EU concerning animal feed.

Eurocoop is the European community of consumer cooperatives. Its Secretariat is based in Brussels. Its members are the national organisations of consumer cooperatives in 18 European countries. Created in 1957, Eurocoop today represents over 3,200 local and regional cooperatives, whose members amount to more than 25 million consumers across Europe.

The European Environmental Bureau (EEB) is a federation of over 145 environmental organizations representing about 20 million citizens and based in all EU Member States. These organizations range from local and national, to European and international. Our aim is to protect and improve the environment of Europe and to enable the citizens of Europe to play their part in achieving that goal. The Brussels office was established in 1974 as a focal point for its members to monitor and respond to the emerging EU environmental policy. It has an information service, runs working groups of EEB members, produces position papers on topics that are, or should be, on the EU agenda, and represents the membership in discussions with the Commission, the European Parliament and the Council. It closely coordinates EU-oriented activities with its members at national level.

Friends of the Earth Europe (FoEE) campaigns for sustainable and just societies and for the protection of the environment, unites more than 30 national organisations around Europe with thousands of local groups. FoEE is part of the world's largest grassroots environmental network, Friends of the Earth International which has members in 70 countries worldwide with over 2 million members.

The GM-free Ireland Network represents over one million citizens and is a coalition of 18 local authorities, 130 food and farm organisations and NGOs collaborating to keep the whole island of Ireland free of genetically modified animal feed, seeds, trees, crops, livestock, fish and food. Members include farmers, foresters, food producers, food distributors and exporters, restaurants, professional associations, doctors, economists, lawyers, journalists, chefs, students, and consumers.

Greenpeace is an independent campaigning organisation with offices in 42 countries worldwide. Greenpeace European Unit is based in Brussels, where we monitor and analyse the work of the institutions of the EU, expose deficient EU policies and laws, and challenge decision-makers to implement progressive solutions.

The **IFOAM EU Group** represents the 330 member organisations of the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements in the EU 27 and EFTA countries, working on organic production. Member organisations include: consumer, farmer and processor associations; research, education and advisory organisations; certification bodies and commercial organic companies.

Save our Seeds is a European Coalition to protect the purity of seed. 350 organisations and over 250,000 citizens from all member states of the European Union have signed a joint petition to the European Commission to prevent the contamination of conventional and organic seeds from genetically modified varieties.