



IRISH GOVERNMENT URGED TO REJECT "FAKE EC PROPOSAL FOR GMO-FREE ZONES"

• 50 organisations say proposal would be impediment to trade

DUBLIN — 50 Irish farming, food and environmental organisations and businesses sent a letter [1] yesterday to the Irish Agriculture Minister, Brendan Smith, asking him to block the European Commission's latest move to force the approval of more GM crops for cultivation at EU level. [2]

Michael O'Callaghan of the GM-free Ireland Network said failure to do so will make it impossible for the Irish Government to implement its policy to ban field trials and cultivation of GM crops in the Republic. [3], and also weaken the credibility of the Government's proposed voluntary GM-free label that would provide Irish farmers and food producers with a competitive advantage in the global export markets [4].

On 15 June, the Commission published a package of proposals [5] that it secretly prepared in collaboration with the WTO and the European Food Safety Authority, without due democratic process required by law, despite formal complaints from MEPS, scientists and NGOs [6]. The Commission has now requested the Member States to submit comments on the proposals by Monday and to approve them at the Council of EU Agriculture Ministers on Tuesday 29 June. The Commission claims these proposals will resolve the European controversy on GM food and farming by recognising the legal right of Member States to ban cultivation of GM crops on their territories, in exchange for their agreeing to fast-track the approval of more GM crops at the EU level, including 16 new GMO "events" in the pipeline. [7]

Commission fails to establish sound legal basis for national GM crop bans

Legal experts at Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth emphasize that the Commission proposals will not empower Member States to establish national blanket bans on the cultivation of GM crops because of their health, environmental or socio-economic dangers, but only on legally undefined "ethical" grounds. According to a Belgian diplomat, this would leave Member States that ban GM crops individually exposed to ruinous punitive WTO trade sanctions from countries like the USA - who have complained that the EU's GM policies are "unscientific") - without legal defence from the EU. [8]

The proposals also aim to relax the non-binding guidelines for the so-called "co-existence" of GM crops with conventional and organic farming [9], and blatantly ignore the recommendations of the EU's 27 Environment Ministers who unanimously requested the European Food Safety Authority to stop giving positive opinions on GMO products based on secret risk assessment data provided by Monsanto and the agri-biotech industry, without transparency and any possibility of independent scientific peer review. [10]

EU-wide rejection

The Commission proposals are being widely denounced across Europe. France [11] and Spain [12] have already rejected them. Europe's largest federation of environmental citizens' organizations, the European Environmental Bureau (EEB), has advised all Member States to do likewise.

The EU Group of the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) denounced the proposal as a "bluff". A statement [13] issued by IFOAM's EU group on Tuesday said: "While member states last year demanded the possibility to ban GMOs on their territory, this proposal appears to be a fake... Commissioner Dalli [14] claims full flexibility for Member States, [but] the actual proposals do not give any legal certainty on how member states can justify bans," adding "Keeping GMO out of the whole GMO-free conventional and organic food chain is not only a necessary undertaking to react to consumers' demand for GMO-free food, but is also a legal requirement. There is no right to contaminate!"

GM-free Ireland spokesperson Michael O'Callaghan described the EC move as "an impediment to trade" and said the Irish Government must "take responsibility to protect Ireland's health, environmental and economic interests by rejecting the EC proposals at the Council meeting next week."

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NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. The letter to the Irish Minister for Agriculture, co-signed by 50 organisations, can be downloaded at <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/government/letters/GMFI-BrendanSmith2.pdf>
2. The majority of EU member states and Regions oppose GM crops. For details see the GMO-free Europe web site at <http://www.gmo-free-regions.org>
3. Ireland's official policy to ban GM crops is published on page 11 of the Renewed Programme for Government, 10 October 2009:
http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/eng/Publications/Publications_2009/Renewed_Programme_for_Government,_October_2009.pdf
4. See *GM-free Irish label good for business: Added value, increased market share, better branding and unique selling point: the most credible GM-free food brand in Europe*. GM-free Ireland Network press release, 17 November 2009: <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/press/GMFI46.pdf>

See also: *GM-free production: a unique selling point for Ireland - the food island*. 47-page briefing with GM-free market survey, 17 Nov. 2009 (1.2MB pdf). <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/GMFI-briefing-3.pdf>

5. For details on the Commission's proposals, see *Background information on the right of member states to ban the cultivation of GM crops*, Friends of the Earth Europe, June 2010:
<http://www.gmfreeireland.org/downloads/FOE/FOE-Backgrounder-Renationalisation-GMcrops.doc>

6. On 23 February 2010, scientists from across Europe made a formal complaint to the EU Council of Ministers and the European Parliament on the grounds that the Commission has illegally and unilaterally introduced policy changes in the field of GM crops and food. MEPs scientists and NGOs said the Commission proposals would weaken risk assessments and implementation of regulations, describing the back-door move as a "sinister trend" and an "illegal policy change", adding "We think this is the most secretive, opportunistic and cynical attempt which the Commission has ever made to force GM crops into our fields and to thrust GM foods down our throats, even though the people of Europe have said over and over again that they have no taste for them... It is clear to us that the Commission has far exceeded its powers by seeking to introduce —quite illegally— a raft of new GM policies when its powers are in fact limited in the GMO field to the introduction of implementation rules. On this basis, European scientists have made a formal protest to the Parliament and the Council of Ministers on the grounds that the Commission has broken the law. They demand that these Draft Regulations be stopped in their tracks and —in view of their great importance— be brought under proper scrutiny by the Parliament with a period of open and democratic consultation."

Source: *Commission slammed for illegal GM policy changes*, press notice from GM free Cymru (Wales), 23 February 2010: http://www.gmfreecymru.org/news/Press_Notice23Feb2010.htm

See also: *European Commission exceeding its power to approve more GM crops - Scientists denounce sinister move to weaken risk assessments*, GM-free Ireland press release, 3 March 2010:
<http://www.gmfreeireland.org/press/GMFI48.pdf>

7. These include thirteen new GMO maize events, one soybean, one sugar beet and one potato.

8. See *EU Governments wary of GM crop overhaul plans*, Charlie Dunmore, Reuters, 11 June 2010: <http://www.forexpros.com/news/forex-news/update-1-eu-governments-wary-of-gm-crop-overhaul-plans-142401>

9. The so-called "co-existence" of GM crops with conventional and organic farming is biotech industry propaganda, since GM crops inevitably contaminate seeds, crops and the food chain once they have been released, causing massive product recalls, trade disruptions, contamination lawsuits, and economic losses. For details see the GM Contamination Register at <http://www.gmcontaminationregister.org>

10. See the official record of the Environment Council of December 2008: <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/08/st16/st16882.en08.pdf>

See also: *EU Ministers agree to much tighter GM controls, more devolution of decision-making, curtailment of EFSA powers*. Press notice from GM Free Cymru (Wales), 5 December 2008: http://www.gmfrecymru.org/news/Press_Notice05Dec2008.htm

See also: *France Blasts GM Crop Approvals by EU Agency*, Reuters, 5 March 2010: <http://uk.reuters.com/article/idUKTRE6241ZQ20100305>

11. Earlier this month (June 2010), France's Environment Minister Jean-Louis Borloo said the Commission proposals do not address the demand for a complete review of EC assessment system for GM crops, made by all 27 EU nations in December 2008. "There is no way we would swap subsidiarity for the absolute need for a tightening of the assessment criteria," he said, adding that "No new authorisations can be approved in the current circumstances". In March, France also said it no longer recognizes the expertise of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) "because we consider that their opinions are incomplete". In February, France's Agriculture Minister said he was opposed to any national decision-making on GM crops, calling for harmonized EU rules.

12. Spain's Agriculture Minister Elena Espinoza also made it clear that she opposed the proposals. "Moving to authorisations by each country could take us to the beginning of re-nationalisation, something we have never supported in Spain" [source: *EU Governments wary of GM crop overhaul plans*, Charlie Dunmore, Reuters, 11 June 2010: <http://www.forexpros.com/news/forex-news/update-1-eu-governments-wary-of-gm-crop-overhaul-plans-142401>].

13. Member States must reject all attempts to loosen GMO approvals, IFOAM press release, 22 June 2010: http://www.ifoam.org/about_ifoam/around_world/eu_group-new/media/2010/PR_IFOAMEU_GMO-NationalisationProposal_22.06.2010.pdf

14. John Dalli is the controversial European Commissioner for Health and Consumer Policy, who defied the Council of Environment Ministers by approving cultivation of BASF's anti-biotic resistant GM Amlora potatoes shortly after coming into office in February 2010.