

Warning that transgenic maize in Spain could spread uncontrollably

EFSA and Monsanto are ignoring risks for farmers and the environment
Friday, 22 April 2016

In an open letter to the EU Commission, several Spanish, British and German organisations are urging that effective measures be taken to prevent genetically engineered maize from spreading into the environment. As evidenced by the organisations, the ancestor of cultivated maize, teosinte, is widely invading agricultural landscapes in several regions of Spain where, in some cases, the genetically engineered maize MON810 is also cultivated which is producing an insecticidal protein. Since teosinte and maize can interbreed, the organisations are warning that transgenes stemming from MON810 might also be inherited in the wild populations of teosinte and spread uncontrollably in the environment.

“We are requesting the EU-Commission and the Spanish government to stop the cultivation of MON810. Otherwise, gene flow from MON810 to teosinte may cause it to produce Bt toxin. This would, in turn, confer higher fitness to the hybrids of maize and teosinte in comparison to the native teosinte plants and enable the transgenes to spread widely without control. This is a scenario carrying major risks for farmers and the environment”, Maria Carrascosa says for Red de Semillas from Spain.

Teosinte does not normally grow in Europe, but rather in Mexico, which is the joint centre of origin for maize and teosinte. It is not clear how teosinte was introduced into Spain, where it is seen as a weed that has detrimental economic implications for maize farmers. Genetically engineered maize MON810 is produced by the US company Monsanto, and is cultivated in Spain on an area of more than 100.000 hectares.

Gabriela Vázquez from Ecologistas en Acción seriously criticises the authorities in Spain and Brussels: “The Spanish Ministry of Agriculture and the European Commission know that we have teosinte, but they are not taking actions. This situation is untenable.”

Producers of genetically engineered plants holding authorisations permitting the cultivation of these plants in the EU are legally obliged to prepare annual monitoring reports about the associated risks. Therefore, the information about teosinte has to be included into these reports as a potential threat to farmers and the environment. However, as the organisations discovered by analysing official reports published by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) in April 2016, neither Monsanto nor the EFSA have made any mention of the spread of teosinte and its possible implications at all. The organisations consider this to be unacceptable, in particular, because they already informed the Commission about the problem in February 2016.

“The cultivation of MON810 has only been allowed under the condition that there were no relatives of the maize to which transgenes could be transferred and thus spread. This has now changed completely.” Christoph Then says for Testbiotech.

In their joint letter, the organisations Amigos de la Tierra (Spain), Coordinadora de Organizaciones de Agricultores y Ganaderos COAG (Spain), Ecologistas en Acción (Spain), GeneWatch UK, Plataforma Andalucía Libre de Transgénicos (Spain), Red de Semillas “Resembrando e Intercambiando” (Spain) and Testbiotech (Germany) request the EU Commission to

- reject the opinion as put forward by EFSA
- take measures to stop the cultivation of MON810 in Spain
- withdraw the authorisation for the cultivation of MON810 GM maize in the EU, since the

responsible company has repeatedly failed to provide any information on the teosinte infestation in Spain and its risks for farmers and the environment.

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Further information: [The letter sent to the EU Commission](#) [4]

[Previous joint letter to the EU Commission](#) [5]

Attachment

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[PR_teosinte_out_of_control.pdf](#) [6]

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