

Spread of genetically engineered plants out of control in many countries

Contamination in biodiversity will burden following generations
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Today Testbiotech published the first global overview showing how genetically engineered plants such as maize, rice, cotton, oilseed rape, bentgrass and poplar trees are spreading uncontrollably. This is happening in regions and countries such as the USA and Canada, Middle America, Japan, China, Australia and Europe. In many cases, the plants have escaped far beyond the fields into the environment. In some regions, the transgenes have already moved into populations of wild relatives. The overview was published to coincide with the international conference on coexistence with genetically engineered plants (GMCC), starting today in Lisbon, Portugal. EU Commissioner Toni Borg, who is responsible for market authorisations of these plants, will give a video speech at the conference sponsored by companies such as Monsanto and others.

“Coexistence between genetically engineered crops and biodiversity is not possible if crops are spreading into wild populations without control. Industry is contaminating biodiversity and our future seeds – who will hold them responsible?” says Margarida Silva from the GMO-free Platform in Portugal.

There are various reasons for transgene escape. Apart from commercial cultivation and experimental field trials, losses from the import and transport of viable grains for food and feed production are a source of uncontrolled dispersal. The consequences cannot be reliably predicted, and from the cases documented in the overview it is evident that no prediction can be made on how these plants will behave in the long-term or interact with biodiversity.

“EU Commissioner Tonio Borg who is currently pushing for the authorisation of genetically engineered plants in the EU, should be aware of the consequences of this technology on a global scale”, says Christoph Then for Testbiotech. “We need regulations to ensure that the release of genetically engineered organisms is prohibited unless they can be removed from the environment if required.”

A legal dossier published recently by Testbiotech clearly shows a lack of global regulation. The precautionary principle as established in the European Union can only be implemented if there are effective measures in place to remove genetically engineered organisms from the environment if this is urgently required. But even within the EU, a regulatory framework is needed to clarify how this can be implemented in practice.

The Testbiotech report “Transgene escape - Global atlas of uncontrolled spread of genetically engineered plants” was realised with the support of the Gregor Louisoder Umweltstiftung, Munich, Germany.

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