Testbiotech background on the Appeal to the EU Commission (July 2016)

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Prioritise the precautionary principle!

The outbreak of teosinte in Spain means that the cultivation of genetically engineered maize has to be stopped!

On 8 July 2016, EU member states discussed whether or not to approve genetically engineered maize 1507 and Bt11 for cultivation and the re-authorisation of GM maize Mon810 (http://ec.europa.eu/food/plant/docs/sc_modif-genet_20160708_agenda.pdf). All three maize events are producing insecticidal Bt toxins.

One of the most important preconditions for cultivating genetically engineered maize in the EU is that there are no wild relatives to which the transgenes can spread. However, in 2009, teosinte was found to be growing in Spanish maize fields as a new alien species (www.testbiotech.org/node/1562). Teosinte is a wild relative of maize and native to Mexico. Crossings between teosinte and maize can enable transgenes from genetically engineered maize to spread and persist in the environment. So far, no effective measures could be identified to prevent teosinte from spreading further. There are also reports about tesosinte being present in France (www.agri79.com/actualites/teosinte-la-teosinte-exige-une-vigilance-touteparticuliere%26fldSearch=arvalis:JFNK3KKU.html).

Consequently, no further cultivation can be allowed based on the Monsanto application and EFSA risk assessment. Both are based on the assumption that there are no wild relatives of maize that could allow the transgenes to spread and persist in the environment. It should be taken into consideration that Spain is the most relevant region for the cultivation of genetically engineered maize in the EU, and that the teosinte might also cross the borders to Portugal or the south of France. Indeed, teosinte has reportedly been found in France (www.agri79.com/actualites/teosinte-la-teosinte-exige-une-vigilance-touteparticuliere%26fldSearch=arvalis:JFNK3KKU.html).

After Monsanto had concealed the problem for several years, civil society organisations informed the EU Commission in February 2016 about the outbreak of teosinte. In response, DG SANTE requested the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) to assess the data (http://redandaluzadesemillas.org/IMG/pdf/160607_respuesta_ce_x_carta_conjunta_teosinte.pdf).

It is imperative that decisive and rapid action is taken. Once gene flow has occurred it can become impossible to remove the plants and control the damage in the environment and for farmers (www.testbiotech.org/node/1677).

Further informations about gaps in risk assessement of genetically engineered plants can be found at: www.testbiotech.org/node/1667