

Global Status of Genetically Engineered (GE) Crops: Consumers and farmers still say NO!

2006 – a year of rejection by consumers, farmers, and governments around the world

The rosy picture that the industry-funded International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-Biotech Applications (ISAAA) is trying to paint of genetically engineered crops and their benefits for farmers and consumers is not consistent with the massive and continuing opposition from consumers, farmers, local and regional authorities, national governments and even from major food companies. 2006 was another “Year of Rejection” for GE crops and GE foods. Below are just a few examples of bad news for the industry from last year. This list serves as an indicator and is far from complete:

Governments turn away from GE technology.

- After eight years of massive cultivation of GE soy, **Romania** became the first country to take steps toward decontamination by banning the cultivation of GE soy. The ban took effect 1 January, 2007. ISAAA claimed that in 2005 Romania grew 125,000 hectares of GE soy. As an example of how ISAAA inflates statistics, the Romanian government confirmed that 87,000 hectares were grown in 2005. Regardless, that number will drop to zero this year.
- ISAAA last year counted **Iran** among countries growing GMOs commercially. It turns out this was stretching the truth a bit too far. Iran is not currently growing nor has it approved any GE crops at a commercial scale. The government has also said that no GE rice is currently approved for field trials.

Farmers say NO!

- Farmers around the world continue to send strong messages of rejection to GE companies by uprooting fields of GE crops. 2006 saw farmer protests in **India**, **France**, and the **Philippines** to name just a few countries where agricultural producers are actively rejecting GE technology.
- In response to the Bayer LL601 rice contamination scandal, the Rice Producers of California and a major rice mill in the state, Sunwest Foods, have called for a ban on any cultivation of GE rice in **California**, including field trials.

Government rejection of new GMOs is widespread.

- In 2006, the Chinese government biosafety committee again requested further data and assessment on the safety of GE rice, thereby delaying a decision about commercial approval for at least another year. This is another slap in the face for the proponents of the technology who hold **China** up as a model adopter.
- In 2006 in **Brazil**, despite consistent attempts by the industry to get GE maize approved, the regulatory body in charge of GMOs, CTNBIO, repeatedly delayed approval.
- The GE regulatory body of **South Africa** rejected an application for field trials of GE sorghum on biosafety grounds, fearing that possible contamination from GE sorghum poses too great a risk to local sorghum varieties. Meanwhile, a US

research institute closely linked with Monsanto, the Danforth Center, announced this year that their GE cassava varieties – promoted as a solution to hunger in Africa – had lost their engineered resistance to African cassava mosaic virus.

- The Supreme Court of **India** has placed a temporary ban on all field trials of GMOs. The Monopoly and Restrictive Trade Practices Commission of India has ruled the Monsanto must reduce the amount charged for GE cotton seeds. When Monsanto failed to act on this mandate, three state governments – **Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Gujarat** – fixed maximum prices that can be charged for the GE cotton seed, approximately 50% less than what the seeds sold for last year.
- Several provinces in the **Philippines** have officially declared themselves GE-free zones.
- In 2006 the number of regions that have declared themselves GE free zones went up to 172 in the **European Union**. Additionally 4500 local authorities in the EU have declared that they want to avoid using GE products. One or more GE crop varieties are now banned in seven European countries. In the last days of 2006, European environment ministers voted with a qualified majority to uphold Austria's ban on Monsanto's genetically engineered maize.
- **Iran** is preparing its biosafety legislation and will allow no GE plantings until it is in place.

A continued lack of confidence is the norm in global markets.

- Kraft Foods, the second largest food producer in the world, committed to supply only non-GE food in **China**, starting from 1 January 2007.
- The biggest soya importer in **Russia**, a company called Sodruzhestvo, which supplies 70% of all soya used in the Russian food and feed industry, declared itself GE-free.
- After the Bayer rice scandal broke, large sectors of the rice industry have committed to being GE-free, including Ebro Puleva, the world's largest rice processor.
- The rice traders of the two largest rice exporting countries, **Thailand** and **Vietnam**, have signed an agreement that commits them to being GE-free. The **Thai** government is actively supporting GE-free status for the Thai rice industry, seizing the opportunities for new markets that have opened up as a result of the contamination of US rice supplies with Bayer's GE rice.
- The All **India** Rice Exporters' Association formally requested that the Indian government prohibit field trials of GE rice in basmati rice-growing states.

Contamination causes serious economic losses.

- **US** rice farmers and global traders and processors lost massively as rice futures prices recorded their single biggest fall ever and rice exports to Europe shut down following the discovery that much of the US long grain rice supply was contaminated with illegal varieties.

The technology has stalled out.

- The GE industry has so far managed to commercialise GE crops with **just two** principal agronomic traits: herbicide tolerance and insect resistance.

- Consumer and farmer rejection of GE food crops has limited the industry to **just four** main crops, grown principally for fiber or animal feed: soy, cotton, canola (or oilseed rape), and maize. Papaya is an acknowledged economic failure on the few U.S. islands where it is currently grown. Attempts to commercially introduce major staple food crops such as GE rice and GE wheat have been stalled by significant consumer **and farmer** rejection.
- After ten years of commercial cultivation of GE crops, most of these crops are still concentrated in a small number of countries. In 2006, the vast majority of GE crops were cultivated in **just four** countries: United States, Argentina, Brazil, and Canada. 70% of the planting takes place in the United States and Argentina.

2006 – a year of contamination

While ISAAA is anxious to boast about the number of GE crops being grown worldwide, it has so far remained silent about issues of contamination. 2006 was also the Year of Contamination by GE crops. The major scandals of the year were the dual scandals of rice contamination in China and in the US, with contaminated rice found widely in European markets. The US rice industry was hit hard and rice exports to Europe have all but ceased. A major maize contamination scandal hit New Zealand at the end of the year, when farmers found out that imported seed was contaminated with GE. No GMOs are allowed to be grown commercially in New Zealand. [More examples can be found on the joint Greenpeace International/Genewatch UK website www.gmcontaminationregister.org]

2007 and the coming decade – what can we expect?

- **Continued market rejection of new GE crops.** The industry will not be able to convince global consumers to eat GE wheat or GE rice, and the governments of major producing countries such as India and China will continue to deny commercial approvals for these staple crops. Consumer rejection will also extend to other crops currently in the pipeline, such as aubergine (eggplant or brinjal) and mustard.
- **More trait failures.** Herbicide-tolerant weeds are currently found in all the countries where herbicide-tolerant crops are being grown. The continued large-scale use of a single herbicide will encourage new weeds to develop. In ten years' time Roundup Ready crops will be obsolete. A similar process will happen with large-scale planting of insect-resistant Bt crops – in ten years' time Bt cotton will be ineffective at controlling insect pests.
- **More costly contamination events.** Starlink maize and LLRICE601 rice are only the beginning. The next decade will see more contamination events, further decreasing consumer confidence in the genetic engineering industry. Lax oversight in the United States of pharmaceutical-producing crops make it likely that at some point during the next ten years the food supply will be contaminated by a drug not intended for human consumption.

Background on ISAAA and their annual report

- Annual figures and analysis produced by the International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications (ISAAA) are often widely quoted in the media to support the claim that GMOs are gaining worldwide acceptance.

However ISAAA is a GE (genetic engineered) industry-funded body whose sponsors include the world's main GE seed companies, who are the main beneficiaries of genetic engineering in agriculture, including Monsanto, Syngenta, Bayer and Pioneer. For a complete overview of all donor support groups of ISAAA, see: <http://www.isaaa.org/>

- ISAAA has successfully exploited the fact that there is not another source of global statistics on GE crops to gain free publicity for promotion of GE crops for many years now.
- The interpretation ISAAA gives of annual figures regarding the global area of transgenic crops always attempts to show worldwide support for GE crops regardless of any more reasoned interpretation of the data.