

Genetic Contamination

☪ Number 00 ☪



With these words we open the first edition of the GMO Observatory Bulletin. Its gestation and following collective birth respond to the true speed at which the developments around ecological farming are happening. A dramatic situation indeed. On the one hand, the great number of cases of GM contamination in the field and in ecological animal feed during the year 2002, have once again proved that ecological agriculture directly threatens the production of ecological goods. On the other hand, the new Ecological Agriculture law for 2009, which has already been approved, throws a bucket of cold water on ecological agriculture by allowing the presence of GM in ecological crops. Furthermore, the situation facing ecological agriculture is further endangered by the lack of public recognition of the problem in the media, a situation of misinformation which brushes cases of contamination under the carpet, which has never happened before.

It is at this point which the birth of this bulletin makes sense, to make a media counterpoint and to periodically inform of the latest events related to the subject. This new, quadrilingual, bulletin comes to you with much excitement to be able to spread this news to all the places which need it most, and to encourage all those interested to implicate themselves in this project and spread the word. With the aim of looking in depth at concrete questions related to the problem, each edition will be dedicated to a central theme with a set of related articles and some brief news. This edition will be about the latest GM contaminations. From the editorial team, we wish you a good read!



This bolletin has been done thanks to the voluntary effort of many people involved in social and ecological struggles. If you would like to collaborate edditing next numbers, or feel like helping with translations or distribution or would like to suggest something, you can write us:

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If you want to get more info about this issue, you can visit our web page:

www.transgenicsfora.net

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🌿 What is genetic contamination? 🌿

"The moment that a Genetically Modified Organism is released into the environment, it may be impossible to get it back or to prevent its dispersion and as such, the adverse effects must be avoided, as they may already be irreversible."



Seventeen years have passed since the European Commission wrote these lines and although the cases of contamination have accumulated year after year, each time they seem to distance themselves more and more from this preventative focus.

Genetic contamination is a concept used to refer to the incorporation of genetically modified (transgenic) genes from a GM plant, into another organism. This contamination can occur in all stages of the food chain, by an accumulative effect: from the seeds; passing via pollinisation between farming plots which are close together; the presence of GM seeds in previous harvests or GM crops getting mixed in during the harvest and in later stages of elaboration.

Genetic contamination is intrinsic to GM plantations and as such makes coexistence without contamination impossible. In the face of these facts, the European Commission, with the aim of implementing this technology, assumes an inevitable level of contamination in conventional agriculture and, in the end, in ecological agriculture. At the same time, the logic of economic compensation is applied.

The first step was to allow a specified threshold for the presence of GMOs – 0.9%– below which it is not obligatory to label this presence. The second step was to try to approve coexistence projects that, should allow the “free choice of the type of agriculture that a farmer wishes to use”. In a Europe where GMO crops are only grown on a commercial scale in Spain, this would come to implicate the allowance of their cultivation in other countries. To allow this, they applied methods of technical prevention [of contamination] which varied greatly between regions (from a highly restrictive system in Greece or Italy to the highly permissive DAR in Cataluña). What’s more, they then reduced all contamination implications (environmental, agricultural, ethical, food safety and socioeconomics) into a single criteria: the difference in price of a product if it would have to be labeled as genetically contaminated.

The last of the red tape was the explicit ban, in the European rules for ecological agriculture, of the presence of GM in ecological products. In the end, the Commission decided to change the rules and allow the presence of GMOs in ecological products, calling it “accidental” and “inevitable”. Can this contamination be avoided despite the fact that they are creating the legal framework for the facilitation of a massive diffusion of GMOs? Is the disappearance of ecological agriculture avoidable if we all do what we can to stop this from happening?

The European Commission against organic agriculture

The European Commission approved last June the new regulation (EC) 834/2007 (1) that from January 2009 must substitute the regulation currently in force for ecological agriculture. (Regulation (CEE) 2092/91).

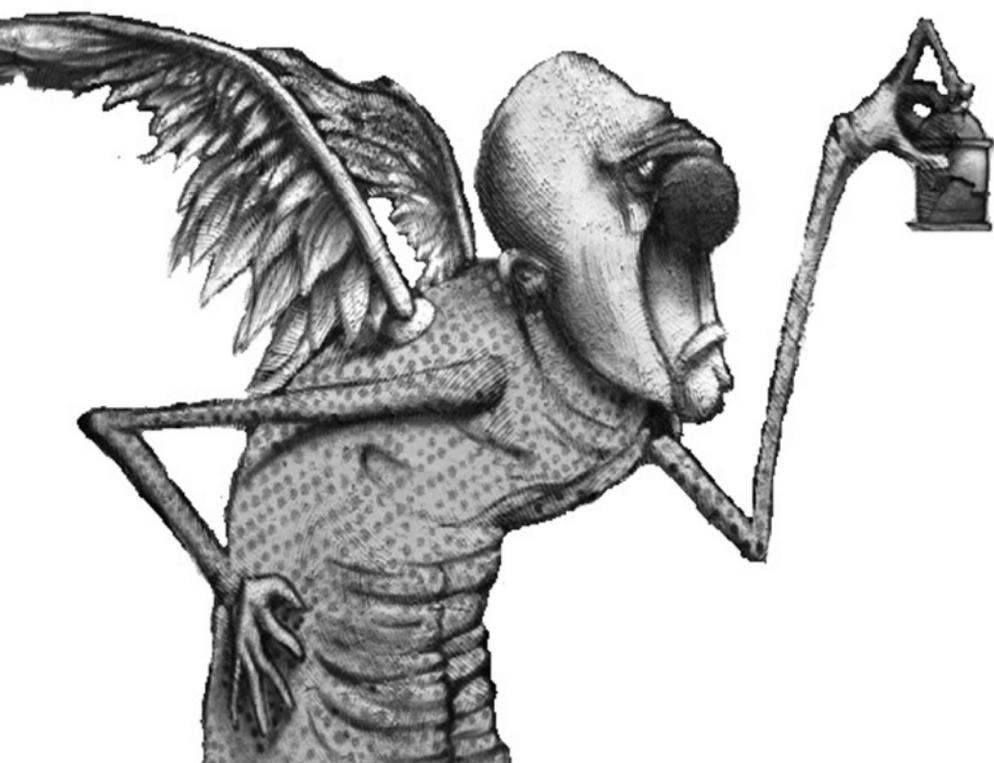
This did not come out of the ecological sector, but from the demands and needs of the great food industry in the face of high demand for ecological food products. As such, it proposes a organic agriculture that is industrial and hierarchical and eliminates the elements that have made organic agriculture sustainable and in solidarity. Amongst the most negative aspects, it is worth pointing out the following:



1. It proposes abolishing all local, regional or national regulations, that enter in contradiction to or that defy the standards of the new regulation. They should adapt themselves to directive 882/2004/CE that constitutes the European application of the HACCP system, made in the USA, and based in the analysis of critical points and their control. This system will eliminate the control and monitoring of ecological production in accordance with the contents of several up to date folders full of technical rules and as a consequence will promote a unique and weak concept of organic agriculture.



2. A new 'organic' category will be introduced into the labeling system, for manufactured products which contain non-ecological ingredients, for example: a yogurt which is produced with ecological strawberries but contains conventional milk.



3. They will be able to use chemical or synthetic additives in specific cases:

a) Each farmer must be able to demonstrate that they have taken all the precautions and measures necessary to control sanitary risks and if they cannot find natural substances to correct the risks, they can use synthetic chemicals.

b) The 'natural substances' must be registered. The problem with this is that apart from the cost of registering, these substances have to be stable and homogenous (which is difficult considering the use of natural conditions/products). These substances could be prohibited using the reasoning, "possible risk".

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4. The acceptance of 0.9% accidental contamination in ecological products. This supposes not only the generalization of the contamination of ecological agriculture, but the real destruction of "bio".

This legislation has been rejected by the more active European ecological sector (2). Now it is necessary that we also mobilize in defense of the fundamental basis of ecological agriculture and against this new regulation.

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(1) This regulation can be found on: http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/qual/organic/index_es.htm

(2) Of the organizations that have criticized this law, we emphasise: Nature et Progrès www.natureetprogres.org, Soil Association www.soilassociation.org and IFOAM www.ifoam.org. We would also like to point out the critical reflections published in «La Fertilidad de la Tierra» nº 30.

☞ Contamination without borders ☞

GM contaminations are rigidly advancing across our lands. To the long list of contaminations listed in "the impossible coexistence" (1), have been added this year, new cases in organic agriculture that prove once again that contamination is inseparable and incontrollable.

Contamination of traditional corn

The centre for conservation of the Cultivated Biodiversity of Manresa (Espanya) analysed at the beginning of 2007, 5 varieties of corn that various campesinos had given in, and one of them, the ecological variety "del queixal" (endorsed and analysed with negative results in 2005 by CCPAE (Catalan Counsel for Ecological Agrarian Production)) gave a 5.6% measurement of contamination with GM Bt-176.

The gravity of this contamination is worsened by the fact that this seed had been sown on the Les Retardes Farm, inscribed in the CCPAE, delivered to various campesinos and handed out at various meetings and ecological fayres. Without knowing it, the possibility of genetic contamination was increased because they were fully confident that the seed was free of GMOs.

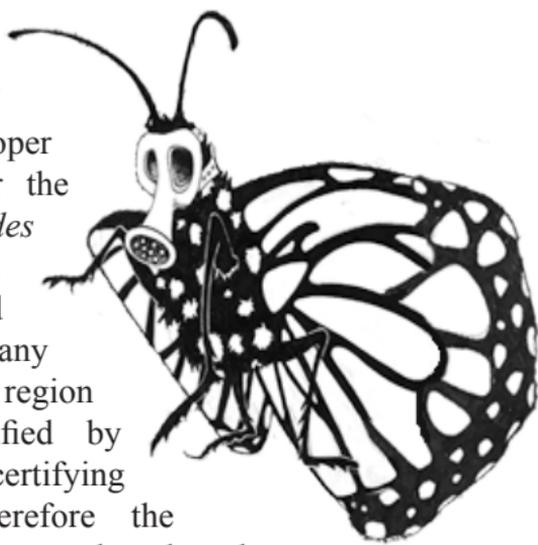
The contamination comes from afar, getting into the animal feed

Assumpta and Ramon are two ecological farmers from *Pallars Jussá* (Catalan Pyrenees), who, in the year 2003 suffered contamination of their animal feed by GM soya (0.7% Roundup Ready) in spite of the fact that this ingredient was not included in the configuration of the animal feed. More recently they have been affected by a new, more serious and greatly complicated case of contamination. In March of last year, the CCPAE took test samples of animal feed from farmers in the Pyrenees to analyse it for the presence of antibiotics and GMOs. The great majority (40 out of 50 of the test samples) turned out to be contaminated, despite the fact that the animal feed had been administered by four different Catalan companies.



The quantitative analysis made by the CCPAE on Assumpta and Ramon's sample, indicates a 42% existence of contamination in ingredients thought to be susceptible to GM contamination. In this case, the animal feed that they give to the calves in the fattening stage, is 18% corn, whilst the rest of the ingredients are wheat, broadbeans and peas. The CCPAE put several calves into quarantine although they limited themselves to analyzing samples only from the *Caldes de Montbui Cooperative*, negating to take any other steps as they claim only to be a certifying entity.

At the beginning of last year, the developer of animal feed for the *Agropecuaria de Caldes de Montbui* (2) had bought animal feed from a French company (Agricola) from the region of Aquitania certified by Ecocert (a French certifying company) and therefore the animal feed was in theory, thought to be free from GMOs. Assumpta and Ramon took their sample to *Sistemas Genómicos* (a laboratory recognized by the EU) and they confirmed that the sample contained 35% +/- 9% contamination by MON 810 corn.



We (PTF) are currently facilitating contact with the *Confédération Paysanne*, passing on this data so that they can continue investigating this case and obtain new information that might allow them to clarify the origin of the contamination. We await news.

The many difficulties in tracing contamination

The difficulties and inconveniences in carrying out a good investigation that would allow us to ascertain the different phases of the process (from the origin of the contamination, passing through the different controls and later monitoring) are enormous if not insurmountable. For the Department of Rural Action (Catalan regional government) there is either, no problem, or they minimize or hide it. The CCPAE restricts itself to fulfilling only its bureaucratic and formal functions and the majority of the affected sector (farmers and salesmen) don't want to implicate themselves in the investigation and report their cases because, according to them, it would economically damage the sector and provoke conflict with the Administration. This is a negative sign of the very little willingness that the Catalan and Spanish organic sector has with which to fight against GMOs, a marked difference to the active roles developing in other European countries. The consequences of this situation are obvious, genetic contamination is unstoppable, absolutely uncontrollable and clearly shows that 'coexistence' (not legal but it is happening) only serves to increase GM cultivation and eliminate organic cultivation. Those who win are the biotech companies and those who lose are the farmers and conscious consumers who want the fields and their plates to be free of GM and who have this possibility made ever more limited.

- (1) Document edited in the year 2006 by Asambleu Pagesa, Plataforma Transgenics Fora! and Greenpeace.
- (2) The Cooperativa de Caldes tells us that they bought some 54,000 Kg of organic corn in France (because they could not find it in Spain) in two batches in January and February of 2007 but they refused to give us copies of the receipts and certificates (because they do not want "problems") that would enable us to continue tracing the source of the contamination.



CASES OF CONTAMINATION

NAVARRA:



2001: contamination of two fields of organic corn, the harvest was disqualified

BASQUE COUNTRY:

2001: 5 cases of contamination of animal feed by GM soya and corn detected in 5 different cattle farms.

CASTILLA-LA MANCHA

2005: 2 fields of corn contaminated by GM maiz (Bt-176 and MON 810)

2007: contamination of a batch of organic corn meant the disqualification and immobilisation of ecological products processed via oven.

ARAGON:



2001: contamination of organic animal feed with GM soya. Disqualification of the chickens from the farm which consumed the affected animal feed.

2003: contamination of a field of conventional corn by GM maiz Bt-176

2004: contamination of 7 fields of organic corn (one of which was a local variety of red corn which was being recuperated) by GM maiz (Bt-176 and MON 810)

2005: contamination of 2 plots of a local variety of organic corn by GM maiz (Bt-176 and MON 810). Disqualification of the harvest of 7.9 hectares of organic corn.

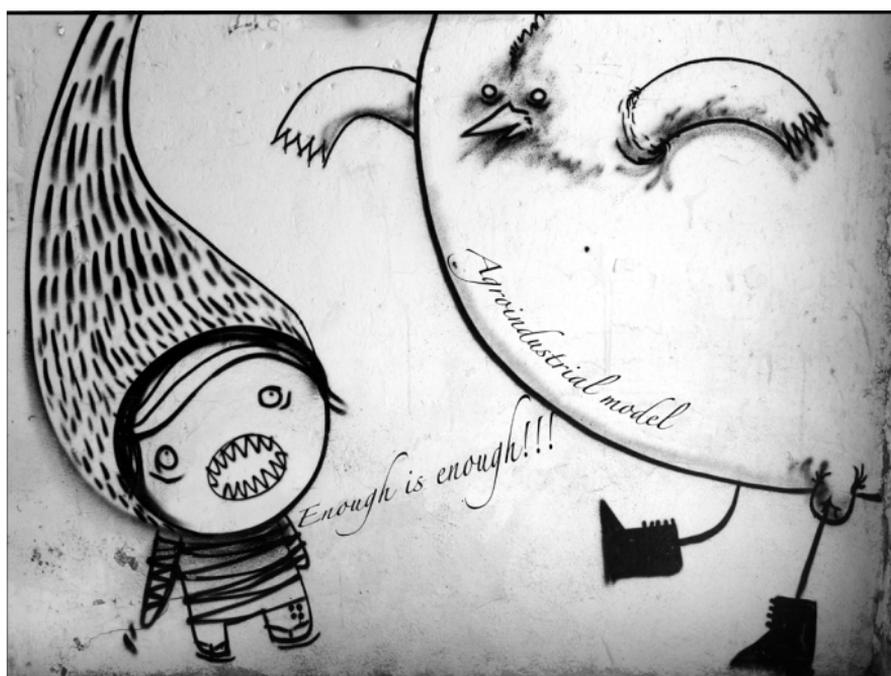
CATALONIA:

2003: contamination of corn by varieties not authorized for commercial use in a demonstration field of new varieties from PIONEER. Contamination of organic animal feed by GM soya on an ecological cattle farm. Detected by the CCPAE, 5 cases of contaminated harvests, processed and organic animal feed.

2004: contamination of corn by unauthorized varieties of GM maiz. Cases reported to DAR by the Assembla Pagesa.

2005: contamination of 4 fields of organic corn, 2 were of a local variety and 1 of the harvests was disqualified and later destroyed by the owner.

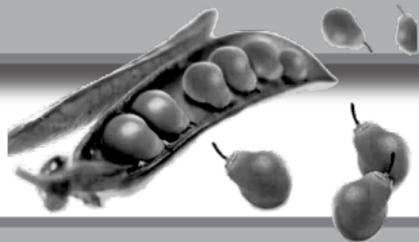
2007: contamination of ecological corn of the local variety "del queixal" from the seed bank ESPORUS. The harvest was disqualified. Furthermore, the seed had been distributed amongst other farmers. 25 cases of contamination by GM maiz in ecological animal feed was found in 25 of the 30 farms inspected by the CCPAE.



The Weeds Resist

From the lobbies of Pro-GMO, they always said it would never happen, but it has happened. GM rapeseed plants in Canada have crossbred with their field companions, wild mustard (considered a weed) and transferring with it, the resistance to the herbicide glifosate Roundup of Monsanto, as has confirmed a study by Canadian scientists from the institution for Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. Given that Canada cultivates millions of hectares of GM rapeseed, it is highly probable that the genes resistant to herbicides have spread and contaminated several fields in North America. This fact has been seen as very worrying by scientific organizations such as the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS), who have already corroborated the emergency and the spread of plants resistant to herbicides.

Source: *GM Watch*



The Caterpillar has Become Resistant to GM

Entomologists from the University of Arizona have demonstrated for the first time the appearance in a cultivated field, of a large variety of caterpillars which have developed resistance to Bt Cotton. The new variety of *Helicoverpa zea* that has been found in the fields of Mississippi and Arkansas, can eat GM cotton that contains the toxin Bt without any problems whatsoever. This cotton was genetically modified to resist all kinds of plagues. That is to say, that it would kill all the insects that eat even a small part of the buds or leaves of the plant. Until now, they had not checked in the field for the appearance and proliferation of an insect with this new characteristic.

Source: *Avui*



France officially suspends MON 810 but allows coexistence

In France, on the 8th of February, the government signed a law for the suspension of the authorization to cultivate GM maize MON 810, the only GMO cultivated in France (22,000 hectares in the year 2007) and the only GMO authorized in the EU. This decision is implemented in the basis of the safeguard clause of the legislation that permits the application of the Precaution Principle when a member state believes it is convenient. Paradoxically, at the same time as they banned MON 810, the French Senate has approved a first reading project of the law on GMOs that transposes the European Directive of 2001, which allows the coexistence of GM cultivations and non-GM cultivations, a type of Decree of Coexistence by the French. So, although they have banned MON 810 (a variety toxic to animals according to the University of Caen) France proposes to develop legislation that allows the cultivation of new GMOs in the future.

Meanwhile, the European Commission now has 60 days to say if it accepts or rejects the French petition for the banning of MON 810. It is possible that to bring a verdict, Brussels will wait for the new evaluation of MON 810 that will take place in October (after ten years of authorization they will make a new evaluation of all GMOs).

Source: AgroBio



The Hottest Potato in the European Union

The ministers of Agriculture for the European Union have not arrived at a consensus over the approval of five GM products. These products were four varieties of GM maiz from Monsanto, a GM maiz from Syngenta and a GM potato rich in starch from BASF, known as Amflora. The five GMOs are destined for animal feed, and given that there was no agreement between the ministers, the decision will fall to the European Commission. The minister of Agriculture for Spain voted in favour of the authorization.

The GM potato is especially controversial because it incorporates a gene resistant to antibiotics, which can transfer itself to humans with grave consequences for human health. "The biotech industry is threatening to establish a terrible precedent if it wins the approval of this potato" said Patrice Courvalin, the director of the Unit of Antibacterial Agents of the Instituto Pasteur in Paris. "We should prevent the dissemination of resistance to antibiotics instead of allowing these products to enter the food chain".

Source: GM Watch

