



Working for organic and traditional farmers
in ROMANIA

CONTACT:

St. David Ferenc, no. 10/5
400102 - Cluj Napoca, RO
Tel/Fax: +40-264-599-204
ecoruralis@gmail.com
www.ecoruralis.ro

Genetically Modified Organisms

What Are GMOs?

Genetically Modified Organisms or Transgenic Organisms are the terms used to define a plant or an animal which is apparently normal, but to which, through genetic engineering techniques, certain genes were transferred from: plants, animals, bacteria, viruses or even human genes, to give them new properties.

Why are they a problem?

-For People: Recent studies demonstrate that genetically modified products affect the health of mammals. MON863 GM corn produced by Monsanto caused serious kidney and liver modifications for guinea pigs during a scientific study in France in 2007. NK603 corn, also produced by Monsanto showed kidney, liver, brain and heart modifications in guinea pigs, along with significant weight differences in a separate study. GM soy (GT 40 3-2) produced by Monsanto was found, in a Russian study to show severe changes in organ functions of guinea pigs, along with cellular level changes and weight loss. This type of soy was authorized for cultivation in Romania until 2007.

-For the Environment: Once released into the environment as either test crops, or commercial ones, genetically modified plants cannot be controlled because they interact freely with the whole ecosystem. The surrounding conventional or organic crops can be modified through pollination, due to the wind and insects.

Also, biodiversity suffers from the genetically modified crops resistant to insects and herbicides. Many insects which naturally feed with the plant pests suffer and even die if they consume the pests from the genetically modified plants. This is the case of the ladybugs which eat aphids. Resistant weeds have already appeared to non-selective herbicides which are used to treat genetically modified plants. GMOs can reproduce and cross with organisms from the natural environment, thus resulting in new organisms, in an uncontrolled and unpredictable way.

-For Farmers: Planting GMO crops takes agriculture out of the hands of small farmers and into the hands of large, foreign companies. Once a farmer buys GMO seeds, he loses the right to reproduce seeds for planting each year. He then has to pay the company who sold him the seeds each season he plants crops which have been genetically modified. Besides a loss of sovereignty for farmers, this takes the strengths of innovation and self-sufficiency out of the hands of small farmers.

The other risk for farmers is the creation of "super weeds" and "super pests" which accompanies the planting of GMOs. Once the weeds and pests become resistant to herbicides and pesticides, ALL farmers have to deal with them, not just the ones planting GM crops. The farmers across the whole

ecosystem are therefor punished for the decision of only a few farmers to plant GMOs.

What is the situation in Romania?

Romania has a relatively long history in the cultivation of genetically modified organisms (GMOs). The first GMO crops in Romania were introduced in 1998, about 14 varieties of genetically modified soy.

The official figures show that:

- in 2004, 5523 ha of GM soy was cultivated,
- in 2005, 87600 ha of GM soy was cultivated
- and in 2006 137275,5 ha of GM soy was cultivated.

When Romania became an EU member state, in 2007, the cultivation of GM soy in Romanian territory was officially banned, because of the European regulations (GM soy was not authorized for cultivation on EU territory, being considered economically unfeasible).

However, the same year, in April, a GM corn named MON810 (belonging to Monsanto Company) was tacitly approved for cultivation in Romania. This was the only GMO authorized in the EU and Romania automatically authorized it. No assessment studies have been conducted regarding the environmental effects of GM corn in Romania.

The official data shows that:

- In 2007 332,5 ha of MON180 maize crops were reported,
- In 2008, 6130,44 ha of MON810 maize crops were reported,
- In 2009, 3093,5177 ha of MON810 maize crops were reported.

Authorities haven't addressed in the internal agenda and in the process of adherence the implications which these crops could have on the environment. Romania is a country in which corn crops have become a tradition, holding a rich genetic heritage of traditional corn varieties. The nearly 3 million ha of conventional corn crops are exposed to contamination. "How will we protect the traditional and conventional corn varieties against GMO contamination?" – is a question for which authorities haven't tried to find an answer.

The Position of Eco Ruralis

We would like an immediate halt to all GM cultivation in Romania, and a moratorium of 5 years of all GM cultivation. The effects of GMOs are not fully known and we feel that the long-term risks of GMOs outweigh the short-term economic gains to be reaped for only a few farmers. We feel that GM crops represent an existential threat to the rights of the vast majority of small farmers in Romania, and that Romania should not so easily surrender its ability to produce food to foreign companies who will then be taking the money earned out of Romania. With seed prices for GM crops in the US soaring, how can we be sure that the Romanian farmer and the Romanian environment is not the next victim? We urge a GMO free Romania, and the development of agriculture for small peasants and consumer health.

For more information and updates on the GMO situation in Romania, please visit the GMO Info Center of Romania at <http://www.infomg.ro>