

# Genetic Engineering Newsletter 22

**Mai 2001**

supported by

**Zukunftsstiftung Landwirtschaft, Gerling Foundation, Triodos-Stichting, Mahle Foundation & Hatzfeldt Foundation**

## **CONTENTS**

Legal and political developments .....	2
Europe.....	2
In Schleswig-Holstein (Germany) contaminated corn detected .....	2
The Minister of Agriculture from North Rhine-Westphalia (Germany), Bärbel Höhne (Green Party) demands a total ban of genetic engineering techniques in agriculture .....	2
New draft of seed trade regulations in Austria .....	2
Magazines sponsored by the Biotechnology Industry distributed in Scottish schools .....	2
North America .....	3
Bush taps Monsanto executive for EPA´s second ranking job .....	3
Recent study shows Monsanto´s RR soybeans means more herbicides in the environment.....	3
Monsanto recalled genetically modified canola because of traces of another herbicide-resistant variety.....	3
Canadian honey banned in Europe.....	3
Asia.....	3
Bangkok – Labelling of GMO food by years´ end .....	3
No release of “Golden Rice” within the next years.....	4
Japan increases the soybean import from Brasil and Canada.....	4
Chinese advocate of GM crops fears restrictions.....	4
Sri Lanka announced strict actions against violators of the new GM food regulation .....	4
International.....	5
Nigeria pleads for labels on GM food.....	5
Science News.....	5
Monitoring gene flow from transgenic sugar beet using CMS bait plants.....	5
New Rice cross with the help of the embryo-rescue technique succeeded.....	5
Business News.....	5
Monsanto´s Roundup Ready cotton approved in Argentina.....	5
News From Organic Farming .....	7
Supportive measures for Organic farming and marketing of organically produced products .....	7

## LEGAL AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

### Europe

#### In Schleswig-Holstein (Germany) contaminated corn detected

During routine checks the Ministry of Environment in Schleswig Holstein, Germany, has found corn seed-batches, contaminated by genetically modified seeds. These are the varieties “Arsenal” from Chile with the identification number F0076H030421, and “Janna” from Canada with the identification number D/H 4620/355. The variety “Arsenal” is contaminated with the variety GA 21, which is not approved in the European Union, the variety “Janna” with the varieties Bt 176 and Bt 11. Bt 11 is also not allowed to be cultivated in the EU. For Bt 176 a limited approval is in place. The Ministries of Environment and Agriculture in Schleswig-Holstein demand farmers, who have bought corn seed with these identification numbers, not to sow this seed. Seed traders are recalling the contaminated batches. In reaction to these news Lower Saxony has also ordered immediate additional controls of corn seed. Investigations of Greenpeace revealed, the contaminated corn seed were delivered from the companies Monsanto and Pioneer HiBreed (27.04. and 02.05.2001 @grar.de Aktuell, <http://www.agrar.de/news>).

#### The Minister of Agriculture from North Rhine-Westphalia (Germany), Bärbel Höhne (Green Party) demands a total ban of genetic engineering techniques in agriculture

During a conference of the Green Party in North Rhine-Westphalia (Germany) the Minister of Agriculture, Bärbel Höhn, demanded a total ban of the use of genetic engineering techniques in agriculture.

Within the frame of the discussion on genetic engineering a SPD-working group presented in Berlin a policy document, in which the working group demands stricter regulations on food labelling (Frankfurter Rundschau, 07.05.2001).

#### New draft of seed trade regulations in Austria

The new draft of seed trade regulations in Austria says that farmers are not allowed to sow a part of their year before harvest without the permission of the seed producers. Politicians of the Green Party criticized this draft. The acceptance of this draft would be a great success for the big seed companies. Farmers would become more and more dependant on them. The trend of patenting and commercializing nature and agricultural goods would be going on (18.04.2001 @grar.de Aktuell, <http://www.agrar.de/news>).

#### Magazines sponsored by the Biotechnology Industry distributed in Scottish schools

More than 140.000 copies of the glossy, full-colour magazine “Your World – Biotechnology and You”, which praises the successes of biotechnology, have been sent to about 600 Scottish schools for teaching purposes. The action took place with the backing of the Inspectorate of Education. “Your World – Biotechnology and You” is published by the “Biotechnology Institute” in Pennsylvania. This institute is funded by big biotechnology companies like Monsanto, Novartis, Pfizer, Merck and Amgen. The fact, that the material has been sponsored by industrial companies, has not been mentioned by the Inspectorate of Education. Scottish teachers, consumer groups and environmentalists in the whole of Scotland protested heavily against the distribution of industrial sponsored teaching materials (Sunday Herald 15.04.2001, cited from AGNET 17.04.2001)

## **North America**

### Bush taps Monsanto executive for EPA's second ranking job

The White House announced, that Linda Fisher, an executive with Monsanto Company, has been nominated for the second-ranking job, the post of deputy administrator, at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The Senate must confirm the presidential nominee (02.05.2001 SPARKS COMPANIES INC.; Morning Comments, cited from GENET 03.05.2001).

### Recent study shows Monsanto's RR soybeans means more herbicides in the environment

According to a new report by Dr. Charles Benbrook of the Northwest Science and Environmental Policy Center in Sandpoint, Idaho, farmers are applying more herbicides to Roundup Ready soybean plants than to conventional, non-genetically modified soya. Previously unreleased data from the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) prove that on average 11.4% more herbicides are used. In many cases the increase was up to 30%. The report also states that university research trials showed that Monsanto's RR soybeans yield 5–10% less than similar conventional soybean varieties (CropChoice # 312 - 03.05.2001; [www.cropchoice.com](http://www.cropchoice.com); the whole report from Benbrook is available on <http://ww.biotech-info.net/troubledtimes.html>).

### Monsanto recalled genetically modified canola because of traces of another herbicide-resistant variety

In Canada traces of another herbicide-resistant variety have been found in seeds of the genetically modified canola variety GT-73. Both varieties, GT-73 as well as the alternative variety GT-200 are approved for use in Canada. The problem is, that only the variety GT-73 is approved for export. Many countries, like China, Japan and Mexico, haven't approved GT-200 yet. Monsanto recalled the contaminated canola seed. Trish Jordan, a spokesperson from Monsanto stressed, that the recall is carried out because of trade implications and not for food safety reasons. In the meantime farmers in Alberta have already seeded 3200 ha of the variety (CP Wire/Reuters 25.04.2001 & Western Producer 03.05.2001, cited from AGNET 25.04.2001 & 04.05.2001).

### Canadian honey banned in Europe

Traces of genetically modified canola have been found in Canadian honey shipments. That has led to a ban in Europe. This means a considerable loss of income for the Canadian beekeepers. Testing honey samples is too expensive, therefore no difference between contaminated and GMO-free honey can be made (Ontario Farmer 03./04.04.2001, cited from AGNET, 04.04.2001).

## **Asia**

### Bangkok – Labelling of GMO food by year's end

Public Health Minister Sudarat Keyuraphan announced in Bangkok, that the policies for labelling genetically modified products would be drawn up within three months. Since there are no clear results about the safety of GMO products, the Ministry has a great interest to pass the regulations very fast with respect to consumer protection. The policies, which the Ministry issues, will not affect the export, added Keyuraphan (Bangkok Post 19.04.2001, cited from AGNET 18.04.2001 – II).

### No release of “Golden Rice” within the next years

According to Greenpeace the genetically modified “Golden Rice” will not be released within the next five years. Greenpeace refers to the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in Manila. In the opinion of IRRI scientists some genetic elements have to be changed or removed first. The cultivation of the “Golden Rice” should help to relieve the vitamin A deficiency in the developing countries. But the announcement of “Golden Rice” and his advantages has provoked also critical voices. The “German World Food Aid” (a NGO, founded as German National Committee of the Freedom from Hunger Campaign of the FAO) prefers to struggle against the vitamin A deficiency by supplying enough fruit and vegetable rather than taking the risks of genetic engineering (GeN-Newsbote, cited from Gen-ethischer Informationsdienst GID, 145, 2001).

### Japan increases the soybean import from Brasil and Canada

In search of non-transgenic soybeans Japan increases the soybean import from Brazil and Canada and decreases the soybean import from the U.S.A. The U.S. market share of the Japanese soybean market fell last year about 15% compared to the year before. Nevertheless the U.S. share of the Japanese soybean market still was 64% last year (Agweb.com, cited from <http://www.cropchoice.com>, Mai 2001).

### Chinese advocate of GM crops fears restrictions

Before the opening of the World Economic Forum in April Chen Zhangliang, bio-technologist and vice-president of Peking University, mentioned, that the Chinese Government has banned the growth of genetically modified rice, wheat, corn and soybean for fear of loosing export possibilities. Last year Great Britain has banned the import of Chinese soy sauce, because it contained GM soybean. Therefore China fears further import bans. On the other hand the cultivation of genetically modified tomatoes and cotton is still allowed (South China Morning Post 18.04.2001, cited from AGNET 20.04.2001).

### Sri Lanka announced strict actions against violators of the new GM food regulation

On May 1<sup>st</sup> the new food regulation in regard to GM food has come into effect in Sri Lanka. Under the new regulation the import, manufacture, transport, storage, distribution and sale of any food item that has been produced using genetic engineering methods will be banned completely. The reason for this decision is, that the cultivation of GM crops holds risks for the environment and the health. The government will take strict action against violators of the new regulation. The U.S.A. criticized Sri Lanka’s total ban of GM foods. According to the U.S. government the World Trade Organisation (WTO) will investigate whether Sri Lanka’s action violates the global trade rules. Weyland Beeghly, agricultural counsellor of the U.S. Embassy in neighbouring India, said furthermore, that the WTO had already called on Sri Lanka to provide scientific evidence to support its decision (Associated Press 13.04.2001, AGNET 14.04.2001 & Reuters 10.05.2001, cited from GENET 11.05.2001 & Cropchoice news 10.05.2001 <http://www.cropchoice.com>).

## **International**

### Nigeria pleads for labels on GM food

On the occasion of the this year Codex Alimentarius conference in Ottawa in the beginning of May the Nigerian delegate Tseaa Shambe pleaded for a quick agreement concerning the regulations for labelling GM food. If it ever turns out that GM foods do present a health hazard, African nations will be hardest hit without any labels on GM food. Other developing nations, particularly India, echoed Nigeria's demand. However, nations that produce such food, notably Canada, the U.S.A. and Argentina, stalled progress toward an international labelling agreement. The next possibility will be at the next meeting, a year from now in Halifax (Globe and Mail, Canada 03.05.2001, cited from GENET 07.95.2001).

## **SCIENCE NEWS**

### Monitoring gene flow from transgenic sugar beet using CMS bait plants

The use of bait plants, which are cytoplasmic male-sterile (CMS), might be an effective tool to investigate the gene flow from transgenic pollen. Plants, which are cytoplasmic male-sterile, are not able to produce fertile pollen and are therefore self-sterile. Scientists of the TU Aachen have used this phenomenon to monitor the gene flow of transgenic sugar beet under realistic environmental conditions. In a field trial they grew sugar beets, which carried a virus resistance gene, an antibiotic tolerance gene and a herbicide tolerance gene. These transgenic sugar beets served as the pollen source. Then the effectiveness of a hemp stripe as a pollen barrier between the transgenic sugar beets and bait plants was tested. They measured the frequency of pollinated bait plants placed at different distances and directions from the pollen source. The results show that the hemp stripe containment strategy is not suitable to prevent gene flow from transgenic sugar beets. Pollination of the bait plants was observed up to 200 m distance to the hemp stripe (Saeglitz, C.; Pohl, M. & Bartsch, D. - 2000 - Molecular Ecology, 9 (12), 2035 - 2040, cited from AGNET 12.04.2001).

### New Rice cross with the help of the embryo-rescue technique succeeded

Scientists of the West Africa Rice Development Association (WARDA), based in Côte d'Ivoire, were able to cross African and Asian rice varieties with the help of the embryo-rescue technique. For years scientists tried to combine the advantages of African and Asian rice varieties without success. Traditional African rice varieties are resistant to droughts and local pests and grow on acid soils. But African rice varieties aren't very productive. In contrast Asian rice varieties bring high yields. The new crosses, dubbed NERICAs (New Rice for Africa), show the qualities of the African parents and have also inherited higher productivity from the Asian varieties. WARDA prophesies 25 - 250% higher yields depending on the use of fertilizer. In addition the new crosses mature 30 to 50 days earlier than current varieties, allowing farmers to grow extra crops of vegetable and legumes (Plant Breeding News, 124, 30.04.2001).

## **BUSINESS NEWS**

### Monsanto's Roundup Ready cotton approved in Argentina

Argentina's Agriculture, Livestock, Fish and Food Secretary Marcelo Regúnaga announced the final approval for the full commercialization of Roundup Ready cotton in Argentina on April 27. Regúnaga's directive came after a review and evaluation by CONABIA (Argentina's national advisory agency on biotechnology) and SENASA (National Service of Food Safety and Foreign Markets Agency). Monsanto judges this decision as a proof of the global acceptance of the advances of biotechnology (<http://www.monsanto.com> 03.05.2001).

## NEWS FROM ORGANIC FARMING

### Supportive measures for Organic farming and marketing of organically produced products

Due to the increasing consumer interest in organically produced products in Germany the Organic farmers should improve quickly their market strategies. This statement was given by the Ministry for Rural Regions, Land Management and Tourism in Schleswig-Holstein, Germany. The Government of Schleswig-Holstein wants to increase considerably the share of Organic farming in agriculture. Therefore it has the intention to increase their support for switching to Organic farming during the next two years. Furthermore in cooperation with the organic farming associations and the sale management the Ministry will work out a concept for an improved marketing and production of organically produced products. Finally the government will support a change in current financial support regulations for farms. It plans to tie the animal bonus and the area bonus, given by the EU, to activities to protect the environment. Investment incentives will be tied to actions improving livestock conditions (@grar.de Aktuell 20.04.2001).

The Government of Thüringen, Germany, as well will trigger the switch to Organic farming. Support measures will be supplied. Furthermore the government offers the Organic farming seeker additional 830.000 DM in 2001. This money is meant to improve the marketing and to increase the demand for organically produced products. In addition the money can be used for information campaigns on Organic farming. The consumer interest in organically produced products increasing at present, shall be changed into a steady consumer demand, which stems from conviction (@grar.de Aktuell 24.04.2001).

Since May 15<sup>th</sup> farmers in Bavaria (Germany) can apply for additional support tied to actions improving livestock conditions (TAZ 02.05.2001).

-----

#### Annotation:

AGNET mail outs are archived at the following Internet site:

<http://www.plant.uoguelph.ca/safefood/archives/agent-archives.htm>

GENET mails are archived at:

<http://www.gene.ch/genet.html>

-----