

Lobby WWF voor 'duurzame' GenTech soja

Bijgedragen door Alec Boswijk
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De door de industrie opgerichte en gedreven organisaties World Wildlife Fund, Solidaridad en de landbouw Universiteit van Wageningen proberen met hun GMSoy Debate genetisch gemanipuleerde soja als 'duurzaam' te betitelen. Het debat hierover wordt op maandag 9 december gehouden in Amsterdam.

Hier volgt een oproep van Miep Bos van Gentechnrije Burgers en alle achtergronden van GM Watch (Engels).

'Je begrijpt dat we zoveel mogelijk tegengeluid willen geven. We kunnen spandoeken ophangen, we hebben folders die we kunnen uitdelen en we willen in de zaal kritische geluiden (op een beschaafde manier!) laten horen. De spreektaal is Engels. Maar we hebben wel teksten die voorgelezen kunnen worden. Alles is welkom: ludieke acties doen het altijd goed voor de pers. Elk idee is het waard om besproken te worden.

De conferentie is bij Aristo, Teleportboulevard 100, Amsterdam Sloterdijk. Aanmelden bij de conferentie is gratis, maar verplicht en kan hier. Zie verder de tekst hieronder. Meldt het even als je ook komt.'

Bron: Miep Bos, woordvoester van De Gentechnrije Burgers en lid van de Natuurwetmoeders.
www.gentechnrij.nl
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PLEASE CIRCULATE THIS MESSAGE WIDELY

URGENT REMINDER FROM GMWATCH - We need to take action before the meeting this Tuesday, December 9th.

1. Take action on WWF's greenwashing of GM soy
2. THE UNSUSTAINABILITY OF GM SOY: details of the disastrous impact of GM soy on people's lives and the environment in Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Bolivia and Uruguay

1. Take action on WWF's greenwashing of GM soy

GMWatch is very disturbed by attempts by WWF and others to set up so-called "sustainability criteria" for GM soy.

We very much hope our readers will help make those behind this misguided initiative fully aware of the concerns about what they're doing.

WWF is one of the most established environmental organizations in the world. For some time, though, there has been growing dismay over its involvement in the 'Round Table on Responsible Soy (RTRS)'. But this project did not previously focus, at least explicitly, on GM soy.

Now WWF has launched a 'GM Soy Debate' in the Netherlands with Solidaridad (their partner NGO in the RTRS) and with the Dutch University of Wageningen - see: <http://gmsoydebate.global-connections.nl/>

It may not be irrelevant that WWF is funded predominantly by industry, and Solidaridad totally so. The Netherlands is, of course, where all the soy importers and processors are to be found.

Whatever's driving this initiative, WWF's involvement in this project will be used not only to support existing GM soya production, but as an excuse to expand it still further.

The GM Soy Debate website states:

"The current debate on Genetically Modified (GM) soy is polarised and unsatisfactory. Without compromising on the relevance of the pro or contra discussion on GM, the GM soy Debate starts from the observation that GM soy is already a major agricultural crop. As such, it should be produced as sustainably as possible. The lack of a shared knowledge database and an open dialectic have so far stood in the way of a constructive discussion on how to achieve this."

Many environmental groups that have been invited by WWF to a stakeholders conference on this topic on December 9th have refused to attend because of their total opposition to this initiative. Many others have not even been invited.

The reasons for opposition are given in detail below (item 2) but they include:

1. GM is not a sustainable technology and so any association with 'sustainability' will lead to confusion - in effect greenwashing GM, and consequently facilitating a likely expansion of its use.
2. GM soya is the biggest cause of destruction of the Amazon, and is also causing degradation of other precious environments. Further, the expansion of GM soya cultivation is being used to force indigenous peoples and small farmers off their land. This is ethically and socially disastrous.
3. Industrial intensive monoculture soya production is unsustainable per se. GM has helped drive this expansion as well as adding all the other risks inherent in GM crops.

As mentioned, WWF's involvement in this project will be used not only to legitimise existing GM soya production, but as an excuse to expand it still further. WWF should not be assisting the GM multinationals in this way, but should instead be working with all the other international NGOs, social movements and small farmers' organisations that oppose GM soya production, and intensive soya production.

Focus should shift to alternatives to soya, like locally produced animal feed, the use of grazing, and to the issues of consumption, over-consumption and waste.

Please write to WWF to let them know your concerns at their involvement in this greenwashing initiative. Their contact details are available here: http://www.panda.org/about_wwf/who_we_are/offices/index.cfm

Please note that on the project website, WWF Netherlands is down as the GM soy project sponsor, but the steering committee includes WWF International.
<http://gmsoydebate.global-connections.nl/content/steering-committee>

So it's worth taking up your concerns with WWF International and with WWF in your own country, as well as with WWF directors, project directors and trustees, anywhere in the world.

2.THE UNSUSTAINABILITY OF GM SOY

Below we have summarized information on the total unsustainability of GM soy monocultures.

This summary of concerns is based largely on the following resources:

*Argentina: A Case Study on the Impact of Genetically Engineered Soya
Executive summary of a report by Lilian Joensen (PhD) and Stella Semino (MA)
<http://www.econexus.info/pdf/ENx-Argentina-GE-soya-Summary-2004.pdf>

*La Soja Mata - a website that provides information in English and Spanish about the direct impacts of large scale soy monocultures on people's lives and the environment.
<http://www.lasojamata.org/>

*THE ROUND TABLE ON IR-RESPONSIBLE SOY

Certifying Soy Expansion, GM Soy and Agrofuels

This report argues that the Round Table is legitimising the existing environmentally and socially destructive practices of soy monocultures which have drawn widespread concern from around the world.

http://www.lasojamata.org/files/RTbriefing%202008_6.pdf

These are the issues:

GM SOY EXPANSION

Between 1991 and 2003, the Argentinean government gave 670 permits for the deliberate release of GM crops. No information was given to the public or to Congress about what was happening. The Advisory Commission on Biotechnology included representatives from biotech companies such as Monsanto, Syngenta, Dow and Bayer.

This laid the ground for the large-scale cultivation of RoundUp Ready (RR) soya, Monsanto's soya genetically engineered to be resistant to the herbicide glyphosate. RoundUp is the brand name of Monsanto's glyphosate herbicide. Once RR soya was established in Argentina, RR seed was smuggled from Argentina to be grown illegally in Brazil,

Paraguay, Uruguay and Bolivia.

The claimed production success story of RR soya in Argentina is nowhere near as straightforward as claimed, even in agronomic terms. For instance, between 2002 and 2003 the area under soy cultivation rose by 1.5 million ha at the expense of other crops and forest clearance, but total production did not increase but fell slightly because overall productivity, actually fell by about 10.5%. The government is unwilling to acknowledge this problem because it sees the income from RR soya as the main way to service the country's debt.

EXODUS FROM THE COUNTRYSIDE

The consequences of growing RR soya in Argentina include a massive exodus from the countryside as small farmers have found they can no longer make a living or are driven off their land.

Small farmers cannot afford the massive machines used for direct drilling, and direct drilling and large scale spraying require little manual labour, so many people have sold or rented their land and left, together with workless farm labourers for slums in the cities.

Others have been driven out due to threats and violence. Traditional peasant communities have also been displaced by intimidation and force. Armed groups have stolen their cattle, burnt their crops and threatened them with violence. Once traditional communities like these are dislodged, the situation becomes irreversible.

This same pattern of rural tension and violence has been seen in the surrounding countries, most notably Paraguay.

LAND CLEARANCE AND DEFORESTATION

Land clearance and deforestation is accelerating. GM soya is the biggest cause of destruction of the Amazon, and is also causing degradation of other precious environments.

As well as destruction by soy producers, forests are also being destroyed because cattle farmers have been forced to find new pastures to make way for GM soy.

Forests and bushes have been cleared either mechanically, by fire or by aerial application of herbicides.

In a 2003 open day at an experimental farm in the heart of the soya region, Monsanto representatives talked about how they helped to clear fields 'that were once considered marginal and now are part of the production chain'. An advisor who worked for a farm in the north of the Santa Fe province reported a similar process of land clearance in his province

MASSIVE USE OF PESTICIDES

The use of agrochemicals and chemical fertilisers has increased. The 18 million hectares currently cultivated with GM soy, occupies more than 50% of Argentina's agricultural land. And soy is the main crop responsible for the growth in agrochemical use in Argentina. Pesticides are used at every stage of production starting well before seed germination and continuing well after harvest.

Aerial spraying has led to ecological contamination and health problems. Communities close to soya cultivation have been seriously affected by aerial spraying of herbicides, most commonly, glyphosate.

One study in Loma Senes showed people suffered from nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, stomach pains, skin lesions, allergies and eye irritation. Similar cases have been reported from many parts of the country and there are also cases involving other chemicals such as 2,4.D.

Argentinean agriculture has not only become dependent on inputs, but is also using pesticides which are prohibited elsewhere. This is linked to the fact that new crop diseases and tolerant weeds have emerged in response to the establishment of GM soya monocultures. Because of glyphosate-tolerant weeds, glyphosate is no longer sufficient to control weeds and a wide spectrum of herbicides, insecticides and fungicides are now used for pest and weed control.

In 2007, for example, fungicide application increased from 32% of the soya cultivated area to 50% of the soya cultivated area. In September 2007 a glyphosate-resistant strain of the weed Johnson Grass started to spread: it was estimated that 25 million litres of herbicides other than glyphosate would be needed to control it every year. The inadequacy of glyphosate was demonstrated in a 2007 field experiment, in Argentina. When the researchers applied a normal dose of glyphosate, 3 litres per hectare (l/ha), only 40% of the weeds were controlled.

In addition to an increasing use of fungicides, producers are now using 2,4.D, metsulfuron methyl, and imazetapir as well as glyphosate. They also use paraquat (responsible for many poisonings in developing countries), and atrazine (a groundwater contaminant now banned in the EU) to deal with "soya volunteers" - fallen seeds which grow after the

harvest.

Syngenta, which produces paraquat, atrazine, and fungicides, proclaimed in December 2003 that Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Bolivia and Uruguay constitute the "United Soya Republic".

GM SOYA NOT A SOLUTION TO HUNGER

As RR soya production has risen, hunger has increased in Argentina to unprecedented levels. Hunger and malnutrition have appeared in a country long accustomed to producing 10 times as much food as the population required.

In 1998, 30% of the population were below the poverty line but by 2002, after another 4 years of GM soya expansion, it was 51%. Malnutrition among infants is estimated to be somewhere between 11% and 17%, and rising.

Now RR soya is being imposed on poor Argentineans as a substitute for meat, milk, eggs, lentils and other traditional products, thus forcing a change in the national diet. Such food projects are often presented as charity and backed by those profiting from soya production.

GM SOYA DAMAGES FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

Although there are claims that RR soya has brought economic benefits to Argentina, any benefits have been in the form of servicing debt. Argentina has committed itself to the production of commodities for export, at the expense of its own natural resources and future generations, in order to service its debts.

This focus on exports is the standard prescription of the international financial institutions, such as the World Bank, that promote the opening up of countries to free trade. The effect is to deprive countries of control over their own development, repeating the pattern of the colonial period.

GM crops have played a key role in facilitating this process in Argentina. The Argentine case should sound the alarm for any country seeking to defend its food security and sovereignty.

ROUND TABLE ON RESPONSIBLE SOY (RTRS)

WWF's 'GM Soy Debate' has developed directly out of its involvement in the controversial Round Table on Responsible Soy (RTRS).

This certification initiative was started in 2004 by a group of producers, NGOs and companies to develop a certification scheme to address the social and environmental impacts of increased soy production.

The RTRS supports an overall reduction in agrochemical use, but this appears to be largely a greenwashing exercise as, in reality, soybean producers and traders in Argentina represented by AAPRESID (one of the stakeholders at the RTRS), and which count agrochemical companies in their membership, are using more pesticides every year.

RTRS allows GM soy. 98% of the soybeans planted in Argentina are genetically modified (RR soya). This GM crop relies on the use of agrochemicals and is primarily responsible for the massive growth in the use of agrochemicals in Argentina.

An Maeyens from A SEED Europe, has described the Round Table on Responsible Soy as "a greenwash exercise for soy producers, agribusiness and European food and feed companies to keep expanding their trade of transporting food stuffs around the world. Soy monocultures are not sustainable - and they should not be legitimised by 'responsible' labels."

Javiera Rulli from the social research centre BASEIS in Paraguay has said: "The soy production boom in Paraguay is having devastating effects. Small landowners are being forced to sell their farms to the big producers because they cannot compete in this aggressive industrial market place. Rural communities that once grew their own food have been driven from the land into the cities where they struggle to find work and live in poverty."

The Round Table on Responsible Soy calls itself a "multi-stakeholder" organisation, but tellingly the communities directly affected by soy production, like those whose plight Javiera Rulli describes, have always refused to be involved.

Some say that RTRS does not even prohibit further destruction of the Amazon. All it does is require that the destruction be "legal" which, of course, leaves it open for producers to pay off the local government to get the permissions they need.

For more on the problems with RTRS see:
 THE ROUND TABLE ON IR-RESPONSIBLE SOY
 Certifying Soy Expansion, GM Soy and Agrofuels
http://www.lasojamata.org/files/RTbriefing%202008_6.pdf

TAKE ACTION

Please write to WWF and ask them not to support the greenwashing of GM soy. GM crops are no solution for hunger, debt or agricultural problems. In fact they are a threat to food sovereignty and security and a tool for inducing dependence.

WWF's contact details are available here: http://www.panda.org/about_wwf/who_we_are/offices/index.cfm