



Letter to European Commissioners from environmental NGOs, farmers' organisations and consumer co-operatives concerning the Commission decision on the cultivation of two new GM maize varieties in the EU

Dear President Barroso,

We are writing to you concerning the proposal recently presented by DG Environment not to allow the commercial cultivation of two genetically modified maize varieties (known as Bt11 and 1507). This proposal is based on new scientific findings which raise serious concerns over the environmental safety of these pesticide-producing GM crops.

We understand that some Commissioners are trying to prevent a broader College debate on this issue. We believe all Commissioners should be given the right to express their views on this matter, which is of great concern to European citizens in all Member States.

The two genetically modified maize varieties in question are engineered to produce a pesticide (commonly called Bt). Bt crops are a particularly controversial type of GMO plants. The Commission itself stated in January 2005 that these crops should not be grown because of concerns regarding their effects on the environment and the overall lack of scientific certainty over the risks they pose¹.

Several scientific studies recently published show that the effects of GM Bt maize are far from predictable and that the potential harm is greater than previously thought. For example, these pesticide-producing plants are toxic to beneficial insects and aquatic ecosystems, and have long-term negative impacts on soil health.

The legal service of the European Commission, when it approved the proposal of DG Environment, agreed that it is the responsibility of the European Commission to consider various aspects, such as risk management factors and new scientific findings, when taking final decisions on GMO plant authorisations. The director of the European Food Safety Authority has also repeatedly agreed with this position².

¹ European Communities' (EC) submission to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) dispute panel, 28 January 2005 "It is a reasonable and lawful position to say that no Bt crops can be planted until there is information on all potential non-target organisms in the soil...". http://www.foeeurope.org/publications/2006/hidden_uncertainties.pdf page 9.

² The Executive Director of the EFSA, Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle, declared on 30 October that "EFSA's experts make an independent scientific assessment of GMO applications. It is then up to Member States and the European Commission to decide whether or not to authorise a specific GMO" http://www.efsa.europa.eu/EFSA/efsa_locale-1178620753812_1178655846172.htm

When considering your decision on the two GMO plants, we would also like you to remember that existing EU legislation requires the precautionary principle to be applied in the implementation of EU provisions on the deliberate release of GMOs³. Rejecting the authorisation of the two Bt pesticide plants is fully compatible with WTO rules, since, as also confirmed by the WTO panel ruling on GMOs, the European Union maintains the right to implement strict biosafety legislation and to take a precautionary approach based on new scientific evidence.

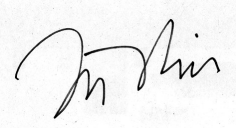
Moreover, under EU law⁴ the Commission must also consider other aspects relevant to GMO plants such as social and economic factors. The vast majority of European citizens and consumers are opposed to genetically engineered plants in agriculture and for food. As you may know, over 60.000 people have signed, in just two weeks, an ongoing petition asking the Commission not to authorise the two Bt crops.

Given the existing concerns over these genetically modified plants and the new scientific evidence recently presented, we urge you to respect EU laws on GMOs and support DG Environment's proposal not to authorise the commercial growing of maize varieties Bt11 and 1507.

Please do not hesitate to contact us should you wish for further information,

Yours sincerely,

Jorgo Riss,
Director, Greenpeace European Unit



On behalf of

Coordination Paysanne Europeenne
European Environmental Bureau
Euro Coop
Friends of the Earth Europe
GM Freeze
Greenpeace
IFOAM
Save our Seeds

³ Directive 2001/18/EC on the deliberate release of GMOs in the environment. Recital 8, Article 1(1), Article 4(1).

⁴ Regulation 178/2002 laying down the general principles and requirements of food law, establishing the European Food Safety Authority and laying down procedures in matters of food safety, Article 3(1), Article 6(3), Article 7(1) and Recital 19.