



ILLEGAL GM MAIZE GROWN IN IRELAND

- **Government destroys its own field trials**
- **Pioneer Hi-Bred seeds contaminated by Monsanto's NK603**
- **Call for investigation to determine extent of contamination**

www.gmfreeireland.org/press/GMFI50.pdf

DUBLIN and GENEVA — The Irish Government has been accidentally growing GM maize, despite its own policy to ban field trials and commercial cultivation of GM crops in the Republic. [1]

The blunder is doubly embarrassing because this GM maize is an illegal variety that is not allowed for cultivation anywhere in the EU.

The discovery was made by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (DAFF) at four of its own field trial sites including the National Crop Variety Testing Centre at Backweston in Co. Kildare, and at three other undisclosed locations in Counties Kildare, Kilkenny, and Cork.

DAFF carried out the field trials with a supposedly Non-GM maize variety PR39T83 supplied by Pioneer Hi-Bred Northern Europe, a subsidiary of DuPont, the world's second biggest seed company and sixth biggest agrochemicals company. The purpose of the trials was to find out if this conventional maize is "suitable for cultivation and use under Irish farming conditions".

According to a press release issued late yesterday by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) [2], routine tests by DAFF discovered that the Pioneer Hi-Bred maize is contaminated by Monsanto's patented GM "event" NK603. The genetic modification forces the crop to survive heavy spraying with glyphosate, part of the cocktail of toxic chemicals contained in Monsanto's controversial Roundup herbicide. [3] Cultivation of this GM maize is illegal the EU, although importation is allowed for animal feed and human food. It is unclear when DAFF first discovered the contamination. The EPA says it was only notified on 3 June - 3 months after the same seeds were found to be contaminated in Germany, and long after they were sown in Ireland. DAFF re-confirmed the contamination on 19 July.

The EPA says that Pioneer provided a "certificate of analysis" claiming the maize was GM-free. But random tests by DAFF found that 3 out of every 1,000 plants were contaminated by the illegal GM maize variety. That's about 300 illegal GM crops per hectare. DAFF says it destroyed its fields of contaminated maize plants before they reached the flowering stage, in order to prevent pollen drift that would further contaminate neighbouring conventional and organic farmers, whose crops would then also have to be destroyed.

This is the first time a GM crop has been grown - albeit accidentally - in Ireland since protestors destroyed field trials of Monsanto's patented GM beets in 1998.

Economic threat to Irish farmers and food producers

It is unclear how much, if any, of the illegal GM maize seeds have been sold and are now being cultivated by Irish farmers. This would cause large economic losses, and would be an ironic blow for farmers who would lose their biggest maize crop in history, thanks to this year's unusually hot and sunny summer. Contamination by pollen drift and seed dispersal from GM maize has already contaminated hundreds of conventional and organic farmers in Spain. [4]

Lack of due diligence and false certificates

GM-free Ireland spokesperson Michael O'Callaghan said "The Pioneer company has provided false GM-free certificates for its GM seeds on at least two previous occasions. The first was in 2007 when we discovered thousands of tonnes of Pioneer's Herculex GM maize (which was then illegal) entering the EU through Dublin port [5]. The second scandal occurred in March of this year, when Pioneer and other agri-biotech corporations sold 23 different varieties of maize seeds contaminated by Monsanto's illegal NK603 to farmers who cultivated them on 3,000 hectares (7,400 acres) in seven states in Germany, where contaminated farmers had to destroy their crops. [6] According to the German-based Foundation on Future Farming [7], the seed companies refused to accept liability and have not compensated farmers for up to hundreds of millions of Euro in economic losses."

"The Department of Agriculture knew this and should therefore have exercised due diligence by testing Pioneer's maize seeds before the field trials began. This is another example of the Government's failure to implement the GM free policy it first agreed three years ago in 2007 and again in 2009."

Call for investigation

Michael O'Callaghan called on the Government to answer the following questions so as to protect the ability of Irish farmers and food producers to retain their share of the rapidly growing EU and US markets for GM-free meat and dairy produce. [8]

- Why did the Department of Agriculture (DAFF) trust the GM-free certification provided by Pioneer Hi-Bred, even though it must have known that similar assurances provided in Ireland in 2007 and in Germany in 2010 proved to be false?
- Why did DAFF not test the seeds before it planted them, in view of the fact that the same contamination by Monsanto's NK603 was discovered 3 months ago in Germany, in early March?
- When did DAFF make the discovery? Why did it wait until 3 June to notify EPA? And why did EPA wait until 22 July to issue a press release?
- Will the Government and the Northern Ireland Assembly require Pioneer Hi-Bred to provide a list of its customers in the Republic and Northern Ireland, publish the names of dealers that may have received the contaminated seeds, and make this information publicly available to farmers?
- Does the Government know if the illegal seeds have been sold and planted by Irish farmers? If so, how many acres of maize will have to be destroyed?
- Will the Government test all maize seed stocks and fields of maize crops for GM contamination?
- Who will pay the costs for testing, crop destruction, and related economic losses? Will the Government apply the Polluter Pays principle and demand reparation from Pioneer Hi-Bred, or will taxpayers and/or farmers end up having to foot the bill?
- Is this an isolated case? Will the Government now make a commitment to test every shipment of imported seeds for GM contamination, or will it continue business-as-usual with random tests?

ENDS

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NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. In 2007 the Irish Government said it would "seek to negotiate to declare the island of Ireland as a GMO-free zone", but there is no record of any such negotiations having taken place.

Ireland's official policy to ban GM crops is published on page 11 of the Renewed Programme for Government, 10 October 2009:

http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/eng/Publications/Publications_2009/Renewed_Programme_for_Government,_October_2009.pdf

But as of June 2010, the Government had not even begun to draft any related legislation.

2. Unauthorised release of GM event NK603 in conventional maize seed, EPA press release, 22 June 2010: <http://www.epa.ie/news/pr/2010/name,30182,en.html>

3. Time and Dose-Dependent Effects of Roundup on Human Embryonic and Placental Cells, Arch. Environ. Contam. Toxicol. 53, 126-133 (2007) DOI: 10.1007/s00244-006-0154-8.
<http://www.springerlink.com>

For more information on Glyphosate and other toxic ingredients of Monsanto's RoundUp herbicide see:
http://www.criigen.org/SiteEn/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogcategory&id=71&Itemid=102

4. Testimonies of Contamination, Greenpeace, 15 October 2009. This report documents the socio-economic and human impacts of GM contamination, based on testimonials from farmers and food producers who have been directly or indirectly harmed as a result of contamination in Spain, the only EU Member State whose government allows the commercial cultivation of GM maize. The testimonials depict the stark reality of serious contamination of conventional and organic crops and the food chain. Download report: <http://www.greenpeace.org/raw/content/eu-unit/press-centre/reports/testimonies-of-contamination-15-10-09.pdf>

5. A joint Greenpeace / GM-free Ireland investigation discovered thousand of tones of Pioneer's illegal Herculex GM maize from the USA entering the EU through Ireland in 2007. The shipment was accompanied by laboratory certificates from Eurofins GeneScan Inc. which specifically claimed that the cargo contained no Herculex. But subsequent tests commissioned from Genetic ID by Greenpeace and by the Dutch Government proved contamination by the illegal GMO. The mistake triggered a moratorium on transatlantic shipments of animal feed from the USA to Europe, and hundreds of millions of dollars of losses for grain traders.

For related information see:

- <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/pakrac/index.php>
- Illegal GM maize enters EU through Ireland, GM-free Ireland press release, 30 April 2007: <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/press/GMFI35.pdf>
- Ireland's Genetically Modified Food Scandal, GM-free Ireland press release, 23 May 2007: <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/press/GMFI36.pdf>

6. These include five seed varieties sold by Pioneer Hi-Bred and 18 by Monsanto, Syngenta, Dow AgroSciences and other agri-biotech companies. The contamination was discovered by Lower Saxony's Ministry of Agriculture at the beginning of March 2010. For details see:

- Banned GM maize sown in Germany, BBC News, 7 June 2010: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/10254080.stm>
- Genetically modified corn contaminates crops in seven German states, Deutsche Welle, 7 June 2010: <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,5657053,00.htm>

7. Foundation on Future Farming: <http://www.gmo-free-regions.org/foundation.html>

8. See *GM-free Irish label good for business: Added value, increased market share, better branding and unique selling point: the most credible GM-free food brand in Europe*. GM-free Ireland Network press release, 17 November 2009: <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/press/GMFI46.pdf>

See also: *GM-free production: a unique selling point for Ireland - the food island*. 47-page briefing with GM-free market survey, 17 Nov. 2009 (1.2MB pdf). <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/GMFI-briefing-3.pdf>