

Gene Ethics Media Alert - 24 February 2010

ISAAA reports less GM crops in 2009

The annual GM industry-funded survey of global GM crops, by the International Service for the Acquisition of Agro-biotech Applications (ISAAA), shows 7 of the 25 GM countries grew less genetically manipulated (GM) crops in 2009. No more countries adopted GM and just 2.7% of global agricultural land was used for GM soy, corn, canola and cotton.

“Most GM product goes into animal feed, biofuels or cotton products as shoppers avoid eating GM foods even though are unlabelled,” says Gene Ethics Director Bob Phelps.

“GM is not a global industry. Just six countries dominate GM cropping, with the USA, Brazil, Argentina, India, Canada and China growing 95% of all GM crops. Though 20 other countries, including Australia, grow some GM they are just dabbling.

“ISAAA ignores the policies of the 170 countries and 60 territories that remain GM-free. Only 3 African countries grow any GM crops at all. The Cartagena Biosafety Protocol will be completed this year, giving countries more grounds for saying ‘no’ to GM crops. 156 countries are now members of the treaty but Australia is not among them.

“Of 513 million small farmers world-wide, just 2.75% grow any GM. Most farmers will not grow GM as yields are lower than the best conventional varieties, the patented seed is more expensive and it cannot be saved for replanting.

“No new GM crops have been commercialised since 1996. Pushing GM is like peddling Windows '95 - the technology and its products are past their use by date,” he says.

“ISAAA admits China's GM area was 3% lower and Paraguay down 19% in 2009. While Indian Bt cotton expanded a little, the Indian government has banned commercial GM eggplant with insect toxins. In the EU the area of Monsanto's GM corn fell in Spain, the Czech Republic, Romania and Slovakia and 5 other EU countries banned it outright.

“Over 60% of the modest increase in global GM area last year was GM maize grown in Brazil but this has escalated deforestation of the Amazon and is unsustainable.

“The ISAAA report fails to assess the escalating resistance of weeds to Roundup's active ingredient, glyphosate, now an unmanageable problem arising from GM herbicide tolerant crops in North and South America. We have similar problems already in Australia and GM will make them worse as wild radish, turnip and charlock acquire resistance. More weed killers are used since GM cropping began in 1996, increasing carbon emissions from more fossil fuel use.

“There is not one commercial GM crop with increased yield, drought-tolerance, salt-tolerance, enhanced nutrition, a nitrogen-fixing grain or other beneficial trait promised by GM companies for over 25 years. Yet GM crops also hinder the development of real solutions to hunger and climate change by restricting funding and farmer access to seeds and knowledge.

“We need new, smarter GM-free farming systems that feed people without wrecking the planet,” Mr Phelps concludes.

More comment: Bob Phelps 0449 769 066 or 03 9347 4500

NOTES:

1. ISAAA (International Service for the Acquisition of Ag-biotech Applications), Brief No 41, Global status of Commercialized Biotech/GM Crops 2009. ISAAA is funded by GM companies, industry bodies, USAID and USDA See: <http://www.isaaa.org/inbrief/donors/default.asp>). The 2009 report is sponsored by two banks: Fondazione Bussolera in Branca, Italy and Ibercaja in Spain.
2. ISAAA says GM crops occupied 134 million hectares in 2009, out of total area of agricultural land around 4.9 billion hectares (source FAO).
3. See <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/india/7196372/India-drops-GM-food-plans.html>
4. France, Germany, Austria, Greece, Hungary and Luxemburg banned Monsanto's Bt maize MON810 because of health and environmental concerns.
5. Von Braum, J, 2008. Poverty, Climate Change, Rising Food Prices and Small farmers. Presentation to the International Fund for Agricultural Development Rome, April 2008. See www.ifad.org/gbdocs/repl/8/ii/e/presentations/IFAD_21-04-08.pps
6. 'Who Benefits from GM Crops'
http://www.foeeurope.org/GMOs/Who_Benefits/who_benefits_full_report_2010.pdf
7. In 2008, GM crops in the USA required over 26% more kilograms of pesticides per hectare than conventional varieties. A 2007 study by a Brazilian government agency found glyphosate use increased 80% from 2000 to 2005. In Argentina, more than 200,000 hectares of native forest disappear every year, mainly due to GM soy expansion.
8. 99% of GM crops are soy, corn, canola and cotton with just two traits – herbicide tolerance and/or insect toxins, launched in 1996. Most GM crops in R&D pipelines are also herbicide tolerant or insect resistant.
9. UNEP, 2008 Organic Agriculture and Food Security in Africa. See http://www.unctad.org/en/docs/ditcted200715_en.pdf
10. IAASTD, 2008 Agriculture at a Crossroads Key findings, See [http://www.agassessment.org/reports/IAASTD/EN/Agriculture%20at%20a%20Crossroads_Global%20Summary%20for%20Decision%20Makers%20\(English\).pdf](http://www.agassessment.org/reports/IAASTD/EN/Agriculture%20at%20a%20Crossroads_Global%20Summary%20for%20Decision%20Makers%20(English).pdf)