

GMO-free Europe needs Germany

Nuremberg 19/02/2009 – The IFOAM EU Group¹ and organic farmers from Austria, Greece, France and Hungary urged German Minister of Agriculture Ilse Aigner to respect their right to maintain their national bans on genetically modified maize. On the occasion of the opening of the biggest organic trade fair - BioFach in Nuremberg, the farmers' coalition asked for German support when the EU Council of ministers decides the issue at the beginning of March.

The farmers passed the message to the German minister that "GMO-free Europe needs Germany" and highlighted the fact, that the vote of Germany at the upcoming Council of EU ministers is decisive for the future of GMO-free countries of Europe. "And this would be only consequent", said Marco Schlüter, director of the IFOAM EU Group as "last week the Bavarian Minister of Agriculture Soeder demanded the right to declare Bavaria a GMO-free Region. "Minister Aigner, coming herself from the Bavarian region, should therefore not measure with two different weights".

The four countries have banned the only commercially grown GMO in the EU, the Maize MON810 because of serious safety concerns. "A recent study commissioned by the Austrian Ministry of Health Affairs indicates that mice fed with genetically modified maize could have adverse effects on its offspring, mentioned Rudi Vierbauch, president of the Austrian organic farmers association "Bio Austria". "As long as there are no follow-up studies disproving this concern, the cultivation and use of GMOs is irresponsible. "

The EU Commission, which suggested lifting these bans, should accept the sovereignty of countries to introduce and keep national bans. "The possibility to ban GMOs must in the hands of local authorities" added Thomas Dosch, president of the German organic farmers' organisation "Bioland". Eva Acs, representative of the Hungarian Organic Farming organisations explained that "Hungary needs the support of Germany to protect its specific ecological system and seed production. The Hungarian ban doesn't affect other nations' right to grow GM plants".

Renè Groneau from the French organic farmers association FNAB finally highlights the issue of consumer rejection. "Consumers do expect organic food to be free of GMOs. But once GMOs are out in the field contamination is unavoidable. Therefore, maintaining the existing bans is also a question of consumers' rights and economic perspectives of farmers".

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Pictures available on demand.

¹ The IFOAM EU Group represents the 334 member organisations of IFOAM (International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements) in the EU, the EU accession countries and EFTA. Member organisations include: consumer, farmer and processor associations; research, education and advisory organisations; certification bodies and commercial organic companies.