



PRESS RELEASE

OPENING UP TO GMOs? NO THANKS!

A broad front of environmentalist associations, organic and peasant farming organisations reiterate that introducing new and old GMOs and cancelling farmers' rights over seeds would be suicide for Made in Italy.

Rome, 21.12.2020: At its meeting tomorrow, 22 December, the Agriculture Committee of the Chamber of Deputies will have to give its opinion on 4 decrees proposed by the Minister of Agriculture, Teresa Bellanova, which, under the pretext of updating phytosanitary measures, reorganises the national seed system, paves the way for the spread of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) and the so-called "new" GMOs (New Breeding Techniques - NBT), which the European Court of Justice, in an enforceable ruling in 2018, has equated with traditional GMOs.

Without any public discussion with farmers' organisations, nor with organic farming or environmentalist associations, but perhaps only with professional agricultural organisations that are also owners of seed companies, the MIPAAF is asking the Parliamentary Commission for a positive opinion on the 4 legislative decrees relating to the National Plant Protection Service, the reorganisation of the seed sector, fruit and vegetable propagation material and vines. It is well known that, as regards the reorganisation of the national seed system, there is no need to adapt to European standards since these have not yet been amended, as our Ministry of Agriculture claims.

The decrees not only attempt to introduce GMOs, "old" and "new", into our country, but also cancel fundamental farmers' rights such as those of seed exchange and reseedling - rights codified by Law No 101 of 6 April 2004 - "*Ratification and Execution of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, with Appendices, adopted by the 31st Meeting of the FAO Conference in Rome on 3 November 2001*". This decision would be taken on the second anniversary of the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Others Working in Rural Areas.

The Associations point out that, while it is stated that "*the aim is to counter the growing risk of introducing harmful organisms into the European Union, such as to seriously threaten our agricultural production systems with negative repercussions on the quality and prices of our foodstuffs*", which is right and acceptable, the intention is in fact to open the way to a much greater danger represented by the new GMOs, which are certainly not a useful tool for defending the typicality, tradition and territoriality of our production, but rather serve to prolong the existence of unsustainable intensive monoculture agriculture that is increasingly dependent on chemicals and which is in fact increasingly threatening biodiversity, the environment, health and the survival of Italy's agricultural tradition.

The 'new' GMOs are even more insidious than the 'old' ones, as new genetic engineering techniques can effectively modify the vast majority of species of agricultural interest such as vegetables like tomatoes, fruit trees like apples or vines, and those of forestry interest.

The presence of new GMOs in open fields would be devastating not only for biodiversity, but also economically. The associations ask what will happen to the growing organic production, which in Italy is worth over 4.3 billion euros, or to the PDO, PGI and TSG products, worth over 16 billion euros, all of which are strictly GMO free?

This question is also addressed to the regions that expressed a favourable opinion on the decrees during the meeting of the State-Regions Conference on 17 December, even though they are members of the European network of GMO-free regions.

*Press release sent on behalf of: *Acu; Aiab; Ari; Fair Watch; Federbio; Firab; Greenpeace; Isde; Legambiente; Lipu; Pro Natura; Slow Food; WWF; European Coordination Via Campesina.*

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MORE DETAILS

New Breeding Techniques (NBTs) obtained through cut-and-sew genetic engineering techniques, should be considered, as established by the European Court of Justice in 2018, in the same way as other GMOs since to date it has not been demonstrated at all that these new GMOs do not present a risk to agriculture, the environment and Italian biodiversity. The opening up to NBTs also represents a serious threat to our agricultural sector from a strictly economic point of view, considering the clear line of opposition to GMOs that Italy has maintained for 20 years in order to protect Italian agriculture and the Italian agri-food sector, which has made non-GMOs a flagship and on which it has built its strength.

Italy's decision to open up to old and new GMOs comes at a time when in Europe the Parliament, with a strong majority and for the 50th time since 2015, has opposed the import of 5 new GMOs (GM soybean MON 87751 × MON 87701 × MON 87708 × MON 89788: 472/194/30, GM maize MON 87427 × MON 89034 × MIR162 × MON 87411: 488/186/22, GM maize MIR604: 489/185/22, GM maize 88017: 489/185/22, GM maize 89034: 490/184/22).

France, Germany and Italy account for more than half of the European seed and plant propagation material market, one third of the world seed market, which is dominated by European companies. The Italian market, which is entirely non-GMO, is worth around one billion.

The activities of seed companies and seed traders cannot be confused with the exchange, for any reason whatsoever, of propagating material derived from one farmer's harvest which is transferred to another farmer for sowing, as these have always been part of normal farming practice and are the basis of great agricultural biodiversity, the processes of adapting crops to new soil and climate conditions and the agri-environmental specificities of different territories, as they are the basis for genetic improvement practised by farmers since the dawn of agriculture, which in turn is the basis not only for the genetic improvement of varieties developed by seed companies, but is the winning and fundamental tool for combating climate change.

The decrees under discussion aim to impose regulations governing the activities of seed companies on seed conservation and exchange activities, including in the area of so-called conservation varieties, which have always been maintained and developed by farmers. These decrees conflict with most of the regional laws defending agricultural biodiversity and annul established and internationally recognised practices. The existence of "informal" seed systems that are distinct from the industrial system is no longer in question. Such "*informal systems*" are, in Italy, often at the basis of an important number of DOP and IGP.

The cancellation of these fundamental rights of farmers would be a gift to a very small number of seed companies, mostly international, and would be economically and structurally damaging to Italian agriculture and its ability to develop crops in the fields and thus respond to ongoing climate change, as well as a violation of international treaties that have long been national law. Preserving, exchanging seeds, sowing one's own crop, i.e. peasant genetic improvement, for the good of all, cannot be criminalised.