

Russian GM News #4

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MOSCOW MAYOR ASKED PUTIN TO STOP GMOs

By Eremurus Club

Head of Russia's capital called for moratorium on GMOs and suggested adopting federal biosafety law this autumn.

Eremurus Club recently became aware that (source of information - Health Commission of Moscow City Duma) on May 28 Moscow Mayor Yuriy Luzhkov urged Vladimir Putin to introduce moratorium on GMOs in Russia.

In his letter delivered to Putin he asks Russian President to close doors for GMOs as soon as possible, until Russia becomes a member of WTO.

The draft Biosafety law Luzhkov mentions in his letter bans the production of GM plants for food, sale of GM food to children under 16 and at hospitals.

The army and navy are also banned from purchasing GM food. The legislation binds producers to indicate the presence of genetically modified components on the packaging irrespective of the GM threshold in the products.

Russian food producers many of which do not welcome GM labeling at all came up with "traditional" comments on this new draft law. Members of RusBrand association (such as Nestle, Kraffoods and others) say that this legislative initiative will only be beneficial for producers of lab equipment.

Letter text:

"Dear President Putin!

Moscow Government pays a lot of attention to the issues of providing food safety and restriction on supply of food containing GMOs, which cause negative impact on human health.

In order to provide realization of consumer rights, including the right for full and true information about goods, providing choice, quality and safety of food the Moscow Government adopted on February 13, 2007 a Decree 88-GIII "On Provisional Measures on

Quality Assurance And Safety of Food Products and on Informing of Consumers In Moscow". This decree introduces special "GMO free!" label since July 01, 2007.

GMO free Initiatives of Moscow were endorsed by the participants of the Round Table on Healthy Food Issues of State Duma on April 10, 2007.

Moscow initiatives were also very much welcome by the Third GMO free regions and products conference hold in Brussels, where Health Commission of Moscow City Duma presented these initiatives.

Due to the fact that measures undertaken by the Moscow Government have only regional significance there is a need to urgently introduce actions on federal level until Russia joins WTO in November 2007. We should take into account negative experience of other countries, e.g. Brazil, where GMOs were distributed without regulation in place. It lead to dependence of country on companies producers of GMOs. It is dramatized by the fact that new data demonstrates negative influence of GMO on live organisms and environment.

Experts from different countries in their presentations during recent GMO free regions and products Conference in Brussels pointed out the issue of 0,9% labeling threshold. They said that contamination should be on zero level, it means that qualitative test methods of identification of GMOs in food products should be preferably used.

Taking into consideration mentioned above, I ask you to encharge appropriate institutions with a task to take measures to do the following:

1. To introduce moratorium on GM-crops, including lines already approved in Russia, until their influence on mammals and environment is defined.
2. To encharge the Government of the Russian Federation with a task to finalize the draft federal law "On biological safety and regulation of supply of food and animal products containing genetically modified organisms and sources and their producers".
3. To create Government's working group on finalizing this draft law and invite representatives of the Security Committee of the Russian State Duma, Moscow City Duma, Russian Academy of Science, NGOs to join it. To introduce this draft law in State Duma in the second half of year 2007.
4. To join Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety - the only international document regulating transboundary transfer of GMOs.
5. To establish a special state institution to regulate issues of biological and genetic safety.

Y.M.Luzhkov
Mayor of Moscow"

PHOTOS AGAINST GMOs IN CIS

Within a Joint International GMO Opposition Month the CIS Alliance for Biosafety initiated and run the Internet photo-action "For My Place Free of GMOs".

People from all over CIS were invited to submit photos with posters promoting GMO free idea at local and national level. The idea of the action was to make a picture with GMO free poster and famous or recognizable symbol of the place in the background.

By the end of JIGMOM people from 4 countries: Moldova and Transnistria, Kazakhstan, Russia and Ukraine took part in the action. Only from Russia organizers got pictures from 8 regions and districts (Bryansk, Kostroma, Moscow, Tomsk, Murmansk - two districts, Saint-Petersburg and Yekaterinburg).

Photos with English language comments are available here:
<http://www.biosafety.ru/index.php?idp=143&idnt=58&idn=1190>
and also on JIGMOM site: <http://altercampagne.free.fr/>

STOP EXPERIMENTS ON KIDS!

By Greenpeace Russia

On June 01, International Children's Day Greenpeace activists came to the Russian Ministry of Health and Social Development demanding a stop to experiments on children. With the Ministry's approval, Russian children are still given genetically modified food. The activists set up a small laboratory near the entrance to the ministry. On the ad hoc table there is a simulated lab rat, frog, rabbit and.. and a human child in formalin. "Kids Ain't No Lab Objects" reads the banner near the "laboratory". About fifty toy babies in glass jars were left on the steps of the Ministry as a reminder to officials about experiments on children.

Greenpeace activists demand that the Ministry of Health ban the use of GMO (genetically modified organisms) in Russia. This and other demands concerning children's health were handed to Ministry officials during the protest.

"Last year, a ban on transgenes in baby food was imposed in Moscow. However, the experiment is still underway in other cities", says Natalia Olefirenko, GM food campaigner from Greenpeace Russia. "The health of Russian children is quite poor; more than 70 percent of children, according to the Ministry of Health, have health problems, while infant mortality is more than four times higher than the European level. The wide distribution of GM food can further aggravate the situation".

Greenpeace only managed to obtain information about the findings of the study on the safety of GMO carried out by the Nutrition Institute of the Russian Academy of Science (RAS) through court. This is not surprising: the findings show that GM species have less vitamins, less essential micro and macro elements and less fatty acids than their conventional equivalents. In addition, they also had a negative impact on the health of laboratory animals: they caused chemical imbalances in blood and urine as well as kidney malfunctions. Similar findings were made by independent Russian and European scientists. Nevertheless, the Ministry of Health declared 16 GM crops safe and permitted their use in food production, including baby food.

"Unfortunately, it's very difficult to advocate for the ban of GMO safety certificates through court. Greenpeace filed a suit against the Federal Service for Supervision in the area of protection of consumers' rights and human welfare, but the legal proceedings are being dragged out illegally", continues Natalia Olefirenko. "Nevertheless, the decision must now be made at the federal level in order to protect all Russian children from a cynical and cruel experiment".

RUSSIAN GM LOBBYISTS LOST IN COURT

By Eremurus Club

On May 30 the Moscow district court delivered a judgment against Arkadiy Zlochevskiy, leader of the Russian Grain Union and binded him and the magazine "Ecology and Life" to compensate moral damage to Russian scientist, professor Vladimir Kuznetsov and to publish a disclaimer.

One of strategic goals of the Russian Grain Union, defined by the recent meeting of its board members is to promote GM corn in Russia. It became publicly known from the document read in evidence during the sittings.

Professor Kuznetsov is one of the leading Russian scientists opposing using GMOs for agricultural purposes. He was also one of the designers of new testing methods and initiators of the creation of network of labs for identification of GMOs in food products in Russia. Due to his efforts method of testing GM-food with biochips was introduced in the country.

The reason why he claimed compensation from the leader of the Russian Grain Union after his interview to the magazine "Ecology and Life" in 2004. In this article he said that the activities of professor Kuznetsov aimed to establish control over GM-producers in Russia is nothing but a string-pulling. He used other negative words and definitions trying to demonstrate that among GMO opponents there are no real scientists. One of the arguments Zlochevskiy referred to in confirmation of the fact that professor Kuznetsov inveighs biotechnology is that he constantly calls producers to implement labeling laws.

The court agreed in 2005 that this interview hurt the reputation of Kuznetsov. Then Zlochevskiy appealed and only this year the court finally confirmed that the Grain Union leader was lying.

NEW BIOSAFETY LAW IN UKRAINE: EFFORT TO REGULATE OR TO LEGALIZE GMOs?

By the CIS Alliance for Biosafety

On June 15 President of Ukraine Victor Yuschenko signed national law "On state biosafety system of creation, trials, transportation and use of GMOs".

Although the adoption of this long awaited biosafety law is welcome by Ukrainian greens there are many gaps in this document. The law is in fact a combination of the proposals of greens' and lobbyists' variants which were previously discussed in Ukrainian parliament in the beginning of this century.

CIS Alliance for Biosafety asked Olexiy Angurets, one of the leaders of Zelenyi Svit/FoE Ukraine (member of the CIS Alliance for Biosafety) and coordinator of biosafety working group of the Northern Alliance for Sustainability (ANPED) to comment the situation. Olexiy Angurets compared Ukrainian law with Biosafety Law of Moldova, which is recognized as the best one in CIS.

According to Olexiy, one of the weak points of the law is a definition of biological safety, which is not very much clear and does not fully correspond with the purposes of law. Main

gap of the law is that it does not involve establishing one institution responsible for providing safety of creation, trials, registration, transport, use and utilization of GMOs. As a result it can lead to the situation of splitted responsibility and holes in biosafety systems. This law also does not provide any registration procedure for GMOs.

No GMO threshold for food products is set; no labelling requirements are outlined (although mandatory labelling of GM-food is provided by the Consumer Law). Protected Natural Areas and zones of genetic safety for them are not mentioned either.

Olexiy is sure that a lot still depends on bylaws to be elaborated in nearest future. This law is more framework than workable regulation.

He notices that after adoption of this law Ukraine should not further suspend ratification of the Amendments on decisions on the deliberate release of genetically modified organisms to the Aarhus Convention on access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters.

Some other observers believe there are no grounds for optimism, because most probably so quick adoption of this law after 6 (!) years since its first reading in parliament is nothing but an effort to legalize GMOs in Ukraine. This country is in the process of WTO accession and in year 2006 it has signed a bilateral agreement with USA. Unfortunately, the full text of this treatment is not available yet, but so called 'trade summary' published on the site of US trade representative office, says the following:

"Ukraine's biotechnology approval process has been inoperative for some time. This has resulted in unpredictable sales conditions for corn products, soybeans and meal. The United States is working with Ukraine to establish procedures regarding biotechnology that are based on modern, science-based risk assessment principles and guidelines, including those of the WTO SPS and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Agreements, the Codex Alimentarius, and the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC)".

The situation looks very similar to Russian, the only difference is that Russia signed with USA a separate "Side letter on biotechnology" and thus welcome the US to participate in the creation of its biosafety regulation (for further information you can look here: <http://www.biosafety.ru/index.php?idp=143&idn=1194>).