

Equivita thanks Minister Luca Zaia and urges him to proceed in defense of Italian citizens' rights

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Translation courtesy of GM-free Ireland: <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/news/index.php>

The EQUIVITA Scientific Committee expresses its support to the [Italian Agriculture] Minister Zaia, who has been placed in a difficult position by Council of State's sensational ruling to authorise the cultivation of genetically modified maize by the Futuragra organisation - upsetting the institutional procedure for the authorisation of GMOs under decree no 212 of 2001.

"I fail to understand the motivation for this decision", said Fabrizia Pratesi, secretary of the EQUIVITA Scientific Committee. "The European Union has not established an obligation to cultivate GMOs. The Member States are only allowed to use them under norms of traceability, labelling and co-existence. In regards to co-existence, it has requested the Member States to formulate the regulations which, in Italy, are connected to the route of legislative decree 212/2001. These regulations are indispensable, if only for economic reasons, and may not be disregarded.

Pre-empting [the implementation of these regulations] signals a disregard for the Precautionary Principle on which the Treaty of the Union is based, the Cartagena Protocol [on Biosafety], and numerous other international agreements.

Moreover, European Commission President Manuel Barroso recently expressed his favourable disposition towards allowing the Member States the freedom of choice on GMOs, and the European Union has accepted the existence of GM-free zones.

We agree with Slow Food in viewing this episode as another move in the sequence of "faits accomplis" through which GMOs have spread up to now, beginning in the USA with their approval by the FDA (Food and Drug Administration) despite the negative opinions of scientists.

EQUIVITA supports the proposal made by the President of Coldiretti [Italy's largest farming union] Sergio Marini for a national referendum (pending it being extended on the European level), since no-one can yet demonstrate any improved traits of GMOs (for citizens or farmers) which would justify not only their dangers and risks, but also all this related confusion and regulatory difficulties.

Comment from GM-free Ireland

This refers to today's announcement that Italy's highest court of appeals has overruled a decision by the Ministry of Agriculture which refused consent for Futuragra, a pro-GM front group based in Vivaro, near Venice, to grow GM maize in defiance of the de-facto ban on the cultivation of GM crops in Italy. The Ministry's previous denial of authorisation cited the lack of regulations on the so-called "co-existence" of GM crops with conventional and organic agriculture.

Commenting on the court of appeals decision, the Agriculture Minister Luca Zaia said authorisation for the cultivation of the GM maize would still require approval by a technical commission - which is unlikely given the lack of "co-existence" regulations. "The court

decision ... obviously contradicts the will of an overwhelming majority of the Italian citizens and regions. And first of all, of an overwhelming majority of farmers who do not want GMOs in their fields.'

Italy's farmers, food producers and consumers are furious at the move. The main farming union Coldiretti (with 18 regional federations for 98 provinces, 765 area offices, 9,812 sections, and over 568,000 farms) is totally opposed to GM food and farming. The most recent Italian survey - carried out by Coldiretti-SWG in 2009 - found that 63% of Italian consumers believe that GM foods are less healthy than traditional foods, up from 52% in 2003

According to Coldiretti's GM expert Stefano Masini, the court's decision only applies to the Futuragra farm and does not signify any change whatsoever to Italy's de-facto national ban on GM crops.

Minister Zaia's web site states that "A new ethics for agriculture is needed if we truly want to feed the world. My opposition to GMOs is well-known, in fact I do not believe that they are the solution to the hunger problem. We are with the farmers and always with those who work.