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Biodiversity Report from the Americas Program of CIP—July 2009



Carmelo Ruiz Marrero | July 31, 2009

Translated from: [Informe de biodiversidad de CIP Programa de las Américas—julio 2009](#)
Translated by: Monica Wooters

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1. CHILE: Resounding Rejection of Genetically Modified (GM) Products

Various Chilean organizations have come out against a legislative initiative which they argue will open up the Chilean agricultural sector to the privatization of seeds, violating the right of farmers to save, share, and sow the seeds that are a product of their harvest. It will also clear the way for GM cultivation.

The text of the proposed legislation originated in the offices of President Michelle Bachelet, which aims to establish and defend the "rights of plant breeders to a variety of plant species." The bill's opponents have referred to the initiative as "protection of property rights for transnational seed corporations." The approval of the law would extend the so-called "rights of plant breeders"—basically, an extension of patent laws—to all plant species, creating conditions for the expansion of GM cultivation throughout the country, according to those opposed to it.

In addition, organic farmers in Chile have maintained that, "If we Chileans want to lose the European market that we have worked so hard to obtain access to, and irreversibly contaminate our produce genetically, and if we want our children to eat unnatural and altered foods and hand over our national genetic heritage in exchange for the payment of an official authorization. If we want the campesinos, who have always provided food for the Chilean people, to be overwhelmed with royalty payments, then ... let's go ahead with the bill!"

The opposition has insisted that the major beneficiaries of the initiative will be the corporations that control the GM seed market and agro chemical companies, particularly trans-nationals like the European company Syngenta and the U.S. corporation Monsanto, the world leader in GM crop and seed markets. "The foreign corporations will control the marketing, imports or exports of agricultural production materials (seeds, plant cuttings, etc.), and in addition will be able to legally obtain the rights to national flora and genetic heritage."

The organizations in opposition to the legislation include Tierra Viva, the Sustainable Foundation of Chile (Fundación Chile Sustentable), the National Association of Rural and Indigenous Women (ANAMURI, Asociación Nacional de Mujeres Rurales e Indígenas), the Pesticides Action Network (Red de Acción en Plaguicidas RAP-Chile), the Center of Education and Technology for the Development of the South (CET-SUR, Centro de Educación y Tecnología para el Desarrollo del Sur) and GRAIN.

Source:

<http://www.mapuexpress.net/?act=news&id=4351>

2. BRAZIL: The Harsh Reality Behind Sugar Cane Ethanol



Environmentalists and renewable energy advocates around the world have long praised Brazil for its leadership in the production and use of sugar cane ethanol in motor vehicles. But the reality is quite different, says Camila Moreno from the organization Terra Direitos, in a recent article.

"That the Brazilian model is exported as something special is a grave matter given that it is nothing more than the same: agribusiness, monoculture, and trans-nationals," states Moreno. "The other issue that calls for concern is that the cultivation of bio-fuels constitutes, as we are already seeing with sugar cane, a vast new frontier in the expansion of GM products, whose risks and impacts create more and more concern and rejection in general and continue to erode sovereignty over strategic resources."

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Photo: Gretchen Gordon.

She adds that "Within the Brazilian civil society, ethanol is viewed as a symbol of environmental degradation, rising costs, and land speculation caused by the expulsion of campesinos from their farms, soil contamination, and an excessive use of water, an increasing use of pesticides, air pollution as a result of slash and burn agriculture—a method used in areas with large plantations (as in São Paulo)—which produces respiratory problems throughout the surrounding population, in addition to the effects on plantation workers."

The sugar cane sector in Brazil is becoming less and less Brazilian as transnational corporations take more control. The U.S. corporation Monsanto recently bought CanaVialis and Allelyx, the two largest companies dedicated to the genetics and development of sugar cane varieties in Brazil.

Moreno insists that it is possible to work with bio-fuels but only when it is on a small scale and within a subsistence model for local markets. In addition, such a process should be seen within a different energy and societal model. In other words, "The use of bio-fuels to sustain the same industrial agro-exporting model that supports the current modern consumerist society, which has in turn generated the climate change crisis, will only result in a cure that is worse than the disease. We cannot take any more risks. We have to look for real solutions, particularly on a human scale."

Source:

Camila Moreno, "Monsanto arrebatada la producción de etanol"
<http://www.rebellion.org/noticia.php?id=88959>

3. NO to Biofuels for Aviation



Demonstrators against biofuels at London's Heathrow airport.

Photo: www.salvalaselva.org/.

The Argentine organization Action for Biodiversity (Acción para la Biodiversidad) has joined the international campaign directed by the German NGO Salva la Selva to demand that the European Commission stop financing research and development of bio-fuels for aviation purposes.

"Aviation agrofuels will create more greenhouse gases, more climate change, hunger (as food is displaced and food prices pushed up), deforestation, and displacement of rural communities, as well as more of the local environmental damage created by expanding airports and increased numbers of flights," warns Salva la Selva.

They believe that aviation provides a vast new market for agrofuels, as it is predicted that the aeronautics industry will see an annual increase of 3 to 4% in the next few decades. This will no doubt put pressure on the industry to reduce its dependence on fossil fuels. Four airlines have already undertaken test flights using fuels made from a vegetable oil base.

Companies are also interested in developing aviation fuels from wood, crops, and other solid biomass, according to *Salva la Selva*. "Much of this research involves genetically engineered microbes and algae, with unknown and potentially very serious impacts on the environment. In the short term, palm oil is the most likely feedstock: Neste Oil says that they could easily convert the world's biggest palm oil biofuel refinery, which they are building to produce fuel for aircraft."

For More Information on the Campaign:

<http://www.regenwald.org/international/englisch/protestaktion.php?id=428>

4. MEXICO: African Palm Plantations Wreak Havoc



The government hopes to see the planting of oil palm in Chiapas reach nearly 109,000 acres in 2009 alone.

Photo: www.ecoport.net.

Friends of the Earth International and The World Rainforest Movement (WRM) have denounced an increase in the planting of African Oil Palms in the southeastern state of Chiapas, pushed by the Mexican government since 2004. This increase is wreaking havoc on the environment and damaging the biodiversity of the region. And the increase is expected to grow. The government hopes to see the planting of oil palm in Chiapas reach nearly 109,000 acres in 2009 alone. A goal of 247,000 acres planted with the palm by 2012 and 2.2 million acres over the following years, has already been set by the Chiapas governor.

According to the international declaration against the "Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil," monoculture oil palm plantations "replace tropical forests and other ecosystems, leading to serious deforestation together with loss of biodiversity, flooding, the worsening of droughts, soil erosion, pollution of water courses, and the appearance of pests due to a breakdown in the ecological balance and to changes in food chains". Additionally, monoculture oil palm plantations "also endanger the conservation of water, soil, flora, and fauna. Forest degradation diminishes their climatic functions and their disappearance affects humanity as a whole."

"The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Forests identified as causes of deforestation and forest degradation governmental policies to replace forests with industrial tree plantations—such as oil palm—in addition to the advance of the agricultural frontier, pushed forward by monoculture tree plantations," states the most recent bulletin from WRM. "Nevertheless, in the Montes Azules region, where deforestation has reached 80% of the 220,000 hectares of forest, the government is talking of creating 'protection belts through high impact production projects, such as oil palm,' among others."

Gustavo Castro Soto of Friends of the Earth International declares: "There is no doubt that great business deals are made at the expense of the poor, on their lands and territories, and at the cost of humanity's common assets. Enough of monoculture plantations!"

Fuentes:

"Mexico: Oil palm business at the expense of the poor," World Rainforest Movement, <http://www.wrm.org.uy/index.html>.

Declaración internacional contra la "Mesa Redonda de Aceite de Palma Sostenible," http://www.wrm.org.uy/temas/Agrocombustibles/Declaracion_Internacional_RSPO.html.

Gustavo Castro Soto, "Monocultivos desastrosos," *Amigos de la Tierra México*, June 12, 2009. Read the complete article (in Spanish): <http://www.wrm.org.uy/paises/Mexico.html#info>.

5. ARGENTINA: More Evidence Against Roundup

This past April, Andrés Carrasco, scientist at the Argentine Ministry of Sciences, told the Argentine daily *Página 12* that the herbicide glyphosate can cause brain damage as well as intestinal and heart damage in fetuses. He noted that these adverse effects occur even when the dosage applied is well below the level actually used in agriculture.

Glyphosate is the active ingredient in Roundup, an herbicide developed by Monsanto. Half of the farmland in Argentina is planted with Roundup Ready soy, a variety that has been genetically modified by Monsanto to withstand Roundup spraying.

According to the latest *Seedling*, a magazine produced by GRAIN, the transnational biotech corporations and their local allies have begun a campaign against Carrasco and his findings. Carrasco has assured that he is not intimidated by these actions and will continue in his research.

Source:

Seedling magazine, July 2009, <http://www.grain.org/seedling/?type=77>.

Marie Trigona, "Monsanto Soy Herbicide Could Pose Health Risks: Study Released in Argentina Puts Glyphosate Under Fire," Americas Program Report, July 13, 2009, <http://americas.irc-online.org/am/6254>.

Translated for the Americas Program by Monica Wooters.

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