

DOW AGROSCIENCES FIELD TRIALS OF GM MAIZE BLOCKED

Johannesburg 25 January 2005.

The African Centre for Biosafety (ACB) has today learnt that its objections, lodged exactly 7 months ago, strenuously resisting Dow Agrosciences' application to field test its GM maize event TC 1507, have been successful.[1]

On the 23 November 2004, the Executive Council (EC), the government body under the aegis of the Department of Agriculture and comprising of government officials from various national departments, took a decision not to approve Dow's application. The Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism in particular, raised questions about impacts on non-target organisms, whereas the Department of Science and technology called upon the Registrar to investigate the ACB's objections in greater detail.

According to the papers submitted by Dow in support of its application, the purpose of the field trial was to "gather information to substantiate EU registrations." Indeed, the European Commission is expected to consider Dow's application for safety approval of Dow's GM maize TC 1507 during 2005.

The ACB expressed outrage at the attempts by Dow to further its commercial interests, namely obtaining EU registrations, and in so doing, utilising the land of South Africa as its experimental "guinea pig."

In its objections, the ACB raised serious questions as to the veracity of the information supplied by Dow since it appeared that Dow may have provided incorrect information to the competent authorities of Argentina, Spain and the Netherlands in order to obtain approvals in those countries for its GM maize TC 1507.

In addition, the ACB raised extensive environmental concerns including the failure by Dow to address the impacts of the GM maize on non-target organisms, the emergence of superweeds and the persistence of Bt toxins in the environment. The ACB also pointed out that the UK competent authority ACRE had declined to approve event TC 1507 for cultivation in April 2004 because of an apparent contradiction in the information provided on the characterisation of the insert.[2]

"Dow's unsuccessful application is encouraging and implies that some biosafety benefits may be reaped from close monitoring and vigilance. We will continue to keep up the pressure on the South African government.[3]" said Mariam Mayet, the Director of ACB.

"We are particularly concerned about the experimentation taking place in the fields in South Africa with GM maize and GM cotton crops by multinational agrochemical companies seeking nurseries in the Southern hemisphere for the production of GM seeds. These GM seeds are re-exported to the United States for further cultivation there during their growing season. We aim to put a stop to this." Added Mayet.

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[1] Objections to the Application made by Dow Agrosiences in Respect of Event TC 1507 to the National Department of Agriculture, South Africa by Mariam Mayet and Shenaz Moola, for the African Centre for Biosafety 25 June 2004
<http://www.biosafetyafrica.net>.

[2] Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment (ACRE) (2004) Advice on a notification for marketing of insect resistant and herbicide resistant tolerant GM maize. April 29, 2004.
http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/acre/advice/pdf/acre_advice52.pdf

[3] For a briefing of the South African permitting system pertaining to GMOs see, M Mayet A Glimpse through the cracks in the door: South Africa's permitting system for GMOs" January 2005
<http://www.biosafetyafrica.net>.