

3rd International Conference on GMO Free Regions, Biodiversity and rural development 19th - 20th April 2007.

<http://www.gmo-free-regions.org/conference-2007.html>
<http://www.gmfreeireland.org/index.php>

The 3rd International Conference on GMO Free Regions, Biodiversity and Rural Development will bring together representatives from GMO free regional governments and municipalities, from farmers, consumers, environmental and other organisations active in the field of GMO free agriculture and the self-determination of regions.

This year's conference will focus on three major topics:

1. The state of national, regional and EU legislation on approvals, risks, liabilities and the eventual co-existence of GMO and GMO free agriculture and horticulture.
2. The erosion of biodiversity, independent farming, and regional quality food production arising from the exclusive control of seed by fewer and fewer companies.
3. The challenges for rural development, biodiversity, food culture and food security arising from the global competition between food and fuel production.

The conference is an excellent opportunity for representatives of the regions, of non-governmental organisations and institutions and the European community to meet and discuss the latest information and successes of GMO free Regions and to share plans for upcoming activities. Participants will be provided with an update on the state of economic, political, and scientific developments and with a road map of upcoming events and decisions. They are invited to discuss practical co-operation and joint strategies in workshops and plenary sessions.

The conference should send clear messages to European institutions and the public about the contamination of GMO free agriculture and food, the freedom of seed production and exchange and the regional priorities with respect to the changing global agricultural market.

The first day of the conference will be hosted by the European Parliament and provide translation in all major languages plus Polish, Bulgarian, Portuguese and Greek. The second day, dedicated to strategic discussions, will be held in English.

This conference continues a tradition started in January 2005 and furthered in 2006 at the "International Green Week" in Berlin, where 250 representatives of GMO free Regions from more than 35 countries met twice. The movement of GMO-free regions is continuously expanding and now covers 174 elected bodies, 3500 municipalities and tens of thousands of farmers in all member states of the European Union and has since spread all across the world.

Programme

This overview should give you an idea what to expect at this conference and complements the detailed programme and list of speakers.

April 19th, European Parliament, Rue Wiertz, Room 3C50, 8.00 – 19:30 h

The Future of Seed

The first session is dedicated to the basics of agriculture and food: Seed. Agricultural diversity is dwindling, even though it is probably the most valuable asset of humankind to adapt to climate change and increasing needs of a growing world population. Free access, planting and reproduction of seed is affected by out crossing from GM plants, which also threaten the purity of conventional and organic seed. A "manifesto on the future of Seeds", recently published by the "International Commission on the future of Food" will be presented during this session.

State of politics and law

Since the waiving of the GMO moratorium in the EU, a few additional genetically modified plant varieties have been approved for processing and consumption, but none for cultivation so far. This might soon change. As there are no EU wide regulations and guarantees for the protection of GMO-free agriculture, national and regional legislation has been developed to this end over the past years. Examples, which show that the so-called co-existence legislation can effectively prevent the cultivation of GMOs will be presented and discussed as well as the massive problems many farmers in the EU are now facing.

The impact of genetically modified plants on biodiversity and rural development

All too often, the approval of GMOs has been reduced to health and environmental safety questions. While these are still unresolved, the general impact of GMO cultivation goes far beyond these issues. Biosafety measures include, problems between neighbours, disruption of the food chain, additional costs and risks for farmers and food producers arise. "Co-existence" as these problems are dubbed by the EU Commission seems hardly feasible in many cases. In many other cases it will be the small and artisanal farmers and food producers and especially organic agriculture that suffer from problems they do not create. A high-level panel discussion will explore these concerns.

Views and experience from the regions

This session is dedicated to the diverse experience with GMO cultivation, the establishment of GMO free regions and the co-existence debates shaping new national and regional legislation. Representatives of regions from all around Europe, but also from overseas will present their experience and demands.

Biodiversity and Rural development in a changing agricultural commodity market

Energy plant production is about to fundamentally change the economics of global agriculture. Food and land prices are rising dramatically, landscapes change their face and a new type of corporate and industrial farming, driven by oil companies emerges. The need to replace fossil fuel and to dramatically reduce climate gas emissions is finally accepted world wide. Is replacing food production by energy

generation on dwindling land and water resources in times of hunger and population growth the solution? Some companies now claim that genetic engineering will allow accommodating all needs. Is there reason to believe this?

Reception at the European Parliament

The day will end with a reception that allows not only for socialising of the participants, but also to meet interested people from the European institutions.

April 20th, Le Chant d'Oiseau, 3 Rue des Franciscains 9 – 16 h

The challenges ahead

The 2nd day will be opened by presentations and a panel discussion on the key strategic issues ahead: pending approval of new GMOs, co-existence clashes, national and regional GMO bans, threats to organic standards and increasing resistance to what more European citizens than ever before reject as unnecessary risks and nuisance. Speakers will come from leading regional bodies, farmers, consumers and environment organisations.

Workshops on key issues

Two hours are dedicated to work in smaller groups on specific issues and plans for activities, which will probably include the approval process, scientific questions, new research and technologies, animal feed supply, legal aspects, political organising, the upcoming Convention on Biological Diversity and the Biosafety Protocol. We are still open for suggestions to this section. An extended lunch break should allow for further networking and exchange.

Animal feed – the hidden invasion

Supply of non-gm animal feed from outside the European Union is still a challenge. At the core of this problem is the lack of transparency and direct influence of the consumers. However, substantial progress is being made and trans-regional co-operation with Brazil and other suppliers is moving ahead.

Strategic Perspectives

At the end of the day, there will certainly not be a single political master plan for the future defence of GMO-free agriculture, biodiversity, and rural self-determination. But we are convinced that some of the workshops will be able to present concrete suggestions and we aim to wrap up this conference by bringing together key strategic elements that have emerged and warrant future co-operation and joint efforts of the participants.

Directly following the conclusion the Conference at 16h, the members of GENET will be starting their annual meeting, which will continue on Saturday, 21st April. If your organisation is not yet a member of GENET, this is the moment to contact the network's secretariat in order not to miss this opportunity.

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