

# The Ecologist

November/December 1996

**CAMPAIGNS  
& UPDATES**

## EU relaxes labelling of genetically engineered food

**In mid-January 1997, the European Parliament approved legislation relaxing requirements to label genetically engineered food as such.**

Under the Novel Food Regulation, some 80 per cent of genetically engineered foods will escape labelling requirements because the genetically engineered ingredients are deemed to be "chemically identical" or "substantially equivalent" to conventional foods.

Existing national regulations applying to the labelling of genetically engineered foods will no longer apply, and no national state will be able to impose stronger labelling laws. Legislation passed by The Netherlands, for instance, requiring all genetically engineered products to be labelled as such is now overruled.

A recent MORI public opinion survey found that 78% of those surveyed in Sweden were "not happy to eat genetically engineered food", 77% in France, 65% in Italy and The Netherlands, 63% in Denmark and 53% in Great Britain. An earlier survey found that 78% of those surveyed in Germany were opposed to food derived from genetic engineering.

The Novel Food Regulation followed approval by the European Commission in December 1996 for Ciba Geigy's Bt corn to be imported, used and grown within the EU, even though 13 member states opposed such approval. Britain was particularly concerned about the antibiotic resistance which the corn carries.

Austria has challenged this decision on the grounds that the conditions for health and environmental safety, as set out under Article 16 of the 1990 EU Directive on the deliberate releases of Genetically Modified Organisms, have not been satisfied. The EU did not carry out its own safety tests on the corn but relied on information provided by Ciba Geigy. Austria has banned import of Bt corn.

Most of the genetically engineered corn is being processed into gluten for animal

feed; some provides corn starch for baby foods, bread, cakes, baking powder, chewing gum, soups and salad dressing.

Ciba Geigy has said that its Bt corn, some 1-2% of the expected US harvest, cannot practically be separated from non-engineered corn. This argument was also given by Monsanto in relation to its genetically engineered soya, although farmers have kept seed from the genetically engineered crop separate to return to the company for next year's sowings. The European Commission approved imports of genetically engineered soya in April 1996; the first shipments arrived in December.

Opposition to the Novel Foods Regulation and to the use of genetically engineered soya and corn is gaining momentum. Under pressure from consumers, several food processors and supermarkets in Austria, Denmark, Germany, the UK, France and other countries have stated that they will not use genetically engineered products, or have called for any foods containing them to be labelled which requires separation from non-engineered crops.

Unilever and Nestlé, two of the largest food producers in Europe, have stated that they will not use genetically engineered soya in their products in Austria and Germany, but have not made similar commitments for other countries such as Britain.

US soya exports to Europe are estimated to have fallen by over 10% in the first four weeks of European protests to genetically engineered soya.

**WRITE TO** food processors and supermarkets demanding the segregation and labelling of genetically engineered foods:

Mr Guy Walker, UK National Manager, Unilever, Unilever House, Blackfriars, London EC4P 4BQ.

Mr D.C. Hudson, Communications and Corporate Affairs Director, Nestlé UK Ltd, St George's House, Park Lane, Croydon CR9 1NR.

J Sainsbury plc, Stamford House, Stamford St, London W1A, 1DN.

Tesco Stores Ltd, Tesco House, Delamare Rd, Cheshunt, Herts EN8 9SL.

Safeway Stores plc, 6 Millington Rd, Hayes, Middlesex UB3 4AY.

Asda Stores Ltd, Asda House, South Bank, Great Wilson St, Leeds LS11 5AD.

Gateway Food Markets Ltd, Somerfield House, Hawkfield Business Park, Whitchurch Lane, Bristol BS14 0TJ.

Co-operative Retail Services Ltd, 29 Dantzic St, Manchester M4 4BA.

Spar Landmark Ltd, 32-40 Headstone Drive, Harrow, Middlesex HA3 5QT.

Waitrose Supermarkets plc, Doncastle Rd, Southern Industrial Area, Bracknell, Berks RG12 8YA.

Marks & Spencer plc, Michael House, Baker St, London SE1 9LL.

**CONTACT:** Test-Tube Harvest Campaign, Women's Environmental Network, 87 Worship St, London EC2A 2BE. Tel: 0171-247 3327; Fax: 0171-247 4740.

Greenpeace, Canonbury Villas, London N1 2PN. Tel: 0171-865 8100; Fax: 0171-865 8202.

**GLOBAL DAYS OF ACTION** against genetically engineered foods and crops are being planned for the week of 21-26 April by consumer, farm and public interest groups from over 24 countries. For more information, contact the Pure Food Campaign, Tel: +1 (218) 226 4164 or 4155; Fax: +1 (218) 226 4157; E-mail <purefood@aol.com>

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## The Ecologist

CAMPAIGNS & UPDATES

Send news, campaigns and updates for inclusion in CAMPAIGNS & UPDATES to: The Ecologist (Campaigns), Agriculture House, Bath Road, Sturminster Newton, Dorset DT10 1DU, UK. E-mail <ecologist@gn.apc.org> Fax: +44 (0)1258 473748.

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## Illegal dredging at Cargill port in Pantanal wetlands

The Bolivian government has begun dredging at the grain port in Puerto Aguirre, owned by Cargill. The dredging is the first engineering work to be carried out as part of the construction of an industrial waterway for barge convoys called the Paraguay-Parana Hidrovia.

The dredging of the port is designed to open the Tamengo channel, Bolivia's 8-kilometre-long link with the Paraguay river which flows downstream into the Parana river, to convoys of 16 barges carrying soybeans and soyameal.

The dredging is apparently supported financially and politically by Cargill. It is being carried out without environmental safeguards and against the recommendations of environmental impact studies funded by the Inter-American Development Bank and the United Nations Development Programme.

Technical experts from the region and a panel of internationally-renowned hydrologists have raised serious doubts as to whether the alterations of South America's second most important river system are advisable. Independent studies indicate that even small changes in the level of the Paraguay river may cause irreversible damage to the Pantanal, the world's largest remaining wetlands ecosystem.

Official studies for the project say that no dredging should take place in the Tamengo channel until additional sedimentation samples are taken, and an adequate waste disposal plan is implemented. They recommend that the planned 16-barge access be reduced to 2 or 4 barges to limit environmental impacts.

Preliminary tests have indicated the presence of heavy metals, hydrocarbons and pesticides in sediments in the channel; disturbing these sediments may endanger the drinking water of at least three cities which obtain their water directly from the channel.

Until now, the only plan for disposing of dredge spoils has been to dump them in the Pantanal wetlands, contaminating wide areas, blocking fish migratory routes, and changing flow patterns in the Tamengo channel in an unpredictable manner.

The Puerto Aguirre grain terminal was originally built with partial funding from the US Agency for International Development. Cargill bought a controlling interest in 1996 and took over operation of the terminal in September. With more land in Bolivia being converted to soya monocultures, Cargill's export costs to Europe will be lowered if the Hidrovia project proceeds.

For more than three years, a coalition of environmental, social, and human rights groups, and indigenous peoples called Rios Vivos has pressed for transparency and public participation in the Hidrovia studies. One of the cities potentially affected, Puerto Suarez, recently staged a general strike in protest at the planned dredging and rock removal from the channel.

The Bolivian foreign ministry made a public commitment in 1996 not to proceed with any partial works on the Hidrovia until all environmental studies had been completed. It now appears as if the interests of multinational grain exporters are pre-empting this.

**PLEASE WRITE**, requesting that the Bolivian government halt all dredging and rock removal activities in the port of Puerto Aguirre, to His Excellency Mr. Gonzalo Sanchez de Losada, President of Bolivia, Fax: +591-2-39-1216; Mr. Ernest Micek, Chief Executive Officer, Cargill Corp. Fax: +1 (612) 742 6027.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**, contact Instituto Centro de Vida, Rua 02, n.203, Bairro Boa Esperanca, Cuiaba-MT, CEP 78068-360, BRAZIL. Fax: +55-65 627 1128/1809; E-mail <invida@nutecnet.com.br> <invida@ax.apc.org>

FIAN USA, c/o Institute for Food and Development Policy, 398 60th Street, Oakland, CA 94618, USA. Tel: +1 (510) 654 4400; Fax +1 (510) 654 4551; E-mail <fianusa@igc.apc.org>

International Rivers Network, Tel: +1 (510) 848 1155; Fax: +1 (510) 848 1008; E-mail <glenn@nutecnet.com.br>

## World Bank downgrades its pesticides policy

More than 180 NGOs and concerned individuals from around the world have condemned the World Bank for "eviscerating" its commitment to reduce pesticide use in its agricultural projects.

In a letter to Bank President James Wolfensohn, the NGOs described the Bank's new Operational Policy on Pesticides as "a huge step backwards from a credible commitment to sustainable development and environmentally-sound pest management."

The World Bank first adopted a policy on pest management in 1985 which required Bank staff to observe 22 operational requirements aimed at minimizing pesticide use and promoting "sound pest management".

Since then, the policy has been progressively downgraded. In 1992, the com-

mitment to reduce pesticides was removed. The new policy converts most of the operational requirements into non-binding "recommendations". Only "excessive use" of pesticides need be avoided.

"The Bank appears to be weakening its policies because it is under increasing pressure to actually carry them out", commented policy analyst with the Environmental Defense Fund, Mimi Kleiner. The Bank has itself documented that hardly any of the requirements of the previous pest management policy were implemented. More generally, another recent internal Bank study found that only half of the Bank's agricultural projects were satisfactorily achieving their goals. "Rather than making an effort to live up to its own guidelines", commented Kleiner, "the Bank appears to be lowering

its standards".

The NGOs concerns are shared by, among others, the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation which has criticized the World Bank for not developing a farmer-centred, participatory approach to pest management. Farmer participation is critical to the success of programmes aimed at reducing pesticide use through Integrated Pest Management. Yet the new Bank policy does not mention the centrality of farmer-driven education and decision-making to IPM.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**, contact: EDF, 1875 Connecticut Ave. NW, 10th fl, Washington, DC 20009, USA. Tel: +1 (202) 387 3500; Fax: +1 (202) 234 6049; E-mail <mimi@edf.org>; Pesticide Action Network, 116 New Montgomery #810, San Francisco, CA 04105, USA. Fax: +1 (415) 541 9253; Maike Rademaker, urgewald, Hacklaenderstr. 12, 50825 Cologne, GERMANY. Tel/Fax: +49-221 552152; E-mail <urgewald@gn.apc.org>

## Food security and flooding in Bangladesh

Participants at the Second European Conference on the Bangladesh Flood Action Plan (FAP), held in the European Parliament in December 1996 on the topic of "Food Security, FAP and Bangladesh", re-endorsed a demand for a moratorium on all construction activities scheduled under the embankment scheme until they are endorsed by the people affected.

One of the major objectives of the scheme is to raise agricultural productivity through a combination of flood control measures and further application of Green Revolution technologies. Yet the World Bank's representative at the Conference admitted that the Plan cannot lead to food security for the undernourished people of Bangladesh.

The construction of massive embankments at a cost of \$10 billion was first proposed after the particularly devastating floods of 1987 and 1988. The Flood Action Plan, initiated by the World Bank and other international donors in 1989, scaled down these proposals to 26 components, including studies and pilot projects, at a cost of \$150 million for FAP's first phase.

After much controversy and strong opposition to the Plan from landless peasant women and men, grassroots organizations, political organizations and others, the United Nations Development Programme sent an independent mission to review the FAP in 1995. The mission was highly critical of the Plan and called for broad public debate, including wide dissemination of the information already gathered through FAP projects and studies.

The FAP and its components have since been reformatted and renamed the "Flood and Water Management Strategy" with the objective of formulating a National Water Management Plan (NWMP) for the twenty-first century. A second five-year phase (1995-2000) of the Plan is now underway to complete old, new and "second generation" FAP projects.

As a result of the UNDP review, *inter alia*, the need for people's participation and environmental impact assessments has been recognized as crucial and integral for project planning and implementation. To date, however, efforts have been limited to consultations rather than

ensuring that those affected by the scheme have any real power or say in the decision-making processes.

The most controversial of the pilot projects is the Compartmentalization Pilot Project (FAP 20) funded by The Netherlands and Germany. The project aims to increase grain production (mainly rice) during the monsoon season by expanding irrigation and using agrochemical inputs.

Another set of FAP components are "priority" constructions, the most critical of which is the Jamalpur Priority Project (FAP 3.1), funded by the European Union and France. These embankments would cause higher levels of flooding and threaten people living on adjacent *char* areas.

The FAP threatens food security in Bangladesh in several ways. Natural wetlands — rivers, *khals*, *beels*, lakes and, most importantly, the floodplain — which are important sources of plant and animal foods will become less accessible to poor women and men.

The building of embankments and other water control structures will hamper the free migration, feeding and breeding of numerous fish and other aquatic species which require access to the floodplain ecosystem to thrive. Floodplain fish provide vital nutrients (calcium, iron, zinc, vitamin A and protein), particularly for poor women and children.

Green Revolution agriculture in Bangladesh has focused until now primarily on extracting groundwater for irrigation during the dry winter season. The expansion of agriculture under the FAP is aimed at growing high-yielding varieties during the monsoon season; such crops would rely primarily on surface water irrigation derived from FAP's various flood and water control structures.

If such agriculture goes ahead, traditional seeds specifically developed by local peasants for the monsoon season — for instance, varieties which are resistant to flooding and grow quickly under rising flood waters — are likely to be replaced by hybrid varieties which require strict regulation of water levels, leading to a potential loss of biodiversity.

The Green Revolution agriculture promoted in Bangladesh so far has caused

the familiar problems of soil degradation, water pollution and health problems such as skin diseases. It has also exacerbated inequalities of income and accelerated the processes of landlessness.

The Conference at the European Parliament issued a declaration containing seven recommendations:

- All agencies and organizations concerned with implementing FAP and its successor projects and plans (eg. NWMP) must put foremost the interests of the people of Bangladesh, especially poor women, men and children.
- Genuine public debate to assess people's wishes regarding water management in relation to their priorities must take place.
- A moratorium must be imposed on all construction activities under the FAP, including FAP 20 and FAP 3.1, and its successor projects and plans until and unless they have been endorsed through the process of genuine people's participation (except for those projects which are clearly non-structural and non-controversial).
- Comprehensive environmental and social analyses must precede project planning and design.
- The potential of the wetland resources must be utilized to improve the livelihoods of the people of Bangladesh.
- Further expansion of Green Revolution technologies under the FAP must be reconsidered and replaced with more appropriate and equitable technologies based on local knowledge and conservation of biodiversity.
- Food security must be ensured for Bangladesh's entire population, including for those producing the country's agricultural wealth.

The declaration concluded that "in the final analysis, the critical issues related to food security, the 'Green Revolution' and the Flood Action Plan raise essentially political questions which need to be resolved through a genuinely democratic and participatory process".

TO ENDORSE the declaration and for more information, contact: Bangladesh People's Solidarity Centre, PO Box 40066, 1009 BB Amsterdam, THE NETHERLANDS. Tel./Fax: +31 (20) 693 7681; E-mail <bpsc@xs4all.nl>

## New EU "patent on life" directive proposed

The European Commission has reintroduced a proposed patent directive to cover living organisms and their parts, under pressure from a large industry lobby. The European Parliament, which rejected an earlier "patents on life" proposal in March 1995, is set to vote on the directive on 23 April.

The directive is almost the same as the previous proposal except for some changes in language and the exclusion of germ line therapy. The current draft excludes human beings from patenting, but not any extracted human part. There is no condition of prior informed consent.

The proposal covers the patenting of animals and plants, and blurs the distinction between "inventions" and "discoveries". The European Patent Convention already provides for inventions, but the genetic engineering industry is seeking special protection for its "discoveries".

**WRITE TO** your Member of the European Parliament to express your concern about patents on living organisms and their parts. The European Parliament Information Office, Tel: 0171-227 4300, has a list of MEPs and their addresses.

**TO SIGN** a Declaration of Principles against patents on living organisms, contact No Patents on Life, Blauenstrasse 15, CH-4142 Munchenstein, SWITZERLAND. Fax: +41-61-411 2688; E-mail <nopatents@igc.apc.org>

## Indian prawn farming victory

Indian groups campaigning against industrialized prawn farming won a major victory in December 1996 when the Indian Supreme Court outlawed all industrial aquaculture within 500 metres of the coastline.

All intensive, semi-intensive, extensive and semi-extensive prawn farms which contravene the ruling must be dismantled by 31 March 1997. Only "traditional and improved traditional" aquaculture will be permitted along the coastline.

The Court also ordered the owners of intensive prawn farms to pay six years' wages as compensation to workers who will lose their jobs as a result of the ruling. In addition, the owners will be liable for the costs of restoring the ecology of coastal areas destroyed by intensive prawn aquaculture.

The ruling follows a three-year nation-

wide campaign initiated by fisherfolk in Tamil Nadu who took legal action in 1994 to prevent their livelihoods being lost to industrial prawn farming.

**CONTACT:** Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Natural Resource Policy, A60 Hauz Khas, New Delhi 110 016, INDIA. Tel: +91-11-6968077; Fax: +91-11-6856795/4626699

**In October, 21 NGOs from Mexico, Central and South America, India and the US meeting in Honduras called for a global moratorium on the expansion of shrimp aquaculture and new shrimp farm construction.**

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has also expressed grave concern over the impacts of aquaculture and is calling on its members, which include several governments, to take measures to curb unsustainable aquaculture.

## Seven die in land conflicts in Brazil

Seven Brazilian peasants, in three separate instances, have been assassinated in 1997 in the ongoing struggle for land rights.

The peasants, whose bodies were "riddled with dozens of bullets," were all squatters occupying land owned by large haciendas, acting on the call of the Movement of Workers Without Land (MST).

The MST, which represents the 41,000 landless families in Brazil, took over the Headquarters of the Institute of Colonisation and Agrarian Reform on 15 January 1997 in response to the growing threat

from gunmen hired by local hacienda owners to intimidate the members of the Movement.

As of 17 January, they were still occupying the building and holding the Institute's superintendent hostage. The issue of agrarian reform has been prominent in Brazil since April 1996, when police massacred 19 peasants in Para during a protest.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION,** contact Food First, Institute for Food and Development Policy, 398 60th St, Oakland CA 94618, USA. Tel: +1 (510) 654 4400; Fax: +1 (510) 654 4551; E-mail <fianusa@igc.apc.org>

## Adopt-a-McStore

The "McLibel" trial ended in December 1996 after two and a half years, the longest trial in British legal history at 314 days. Judgement has been reserved for several months in the libel action brought by McDonald's against two campaigners who distributed a leaflet "What's Wrong with McDonald's" which criticized the global fast-food chain's food, practices and environmental policy.

Campaigners are planning the coordinated leafletting of all McDonald's outlets the Saturday after the judgement has been given, whether it finds in favour of the defendants or not, and thus requesting volunteers to "Adopt a Store"

**CONTACT:** McLibel Support (Adopt-a-Store) 180 Mansfield Rd, Nottingham NG1 3HW. Tel: 0115 958 5666; McLibel Support Campaign, 5 Caledonian Rd, London N1 9DX. Tel/Fax: 0171-713 1269.

## Baby Milk Action

New research conducted in Bangladesh, Poland, South Africa and Thailand shows that leading baby milk manufacturers are openly violating the World Health Organization's 1981 code for marketing infant formula.

The study from the London-based Interagency Group on Breastfeeding Monitoring named five companies as having breached the code — Gerber, Mead Johnson, Nestlé, Nutricia and Wyeth.

*Multinational Monitor* magazine listed Gerber as one of its ten worst corporations of 1996 for pressuring Guatemala to exempt baby food products from the country's tough infant formula law.

Nestlé, which has the largest share of the baby milk market, is the target of an international boycott campaign to encourage it to abide by the WHO code in policy and practice.

**CONTACT:** Baby Milk Action, 23 St Andrew's St, Cambridge CB2 3AX, UK. Tel: +44 (0)1223 464420. E-mail <babymilkacti@gn.apc.org>

## Pepsi leaves Burma

Pepsi-Cola announced in January that it will pull out of Burma. The company has been the target of a consumer boycott. Its franchise-holder publicly supported the SLORC military regime and condemned the country's democracy movement.