

Allowance of GMO Crops

Pacific Organic Policy Toolkit
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One of the most detrimental general policies, for the organic sector, which a country can pass, is the allowance of a genetically engineered crop, particularly when this crop is also a significant organic export commodity for the country. Widespread GM contamination is a major factor of increased costs, loss of reputation, and loss of market for an organic supply chain.

A case in point in this regard is the story of allowance of Bt Cotton in Burkina Faso in 2008, which led to a collapse of the organic cotton sector in the country in 2009-2010 (in addition to being a commercial disaster for the country's conventional cotton sector). The damage is being reversed now, with Burkina Faso cotton companies having declared the phasing out of GM cotton by 2018, but financial damages are estimated at US\$ 280 million for the conventional sector alone, and the national organic sector development has suffered the worst setback of its history, which will have repercussions and missed opportunities for many years to come.

In order to protect their organic sector and as a response to general civil society concerns about GMOs, a growing number of national governments, regions and municipalities take a firm stand against GMO cultivation on their territories and/or sale of genetically modified seeds and foods. Already in 2010, in the EU alone, 169 regions, 123 provinces/departments, and 4713 local governments (municipalities and districts) have passed decrees and resolutions to ban GMO cultivation from their territory, effectively becoming "GMO-free regions"¹. End of 2015, there were 37 countries worldwide² that had officially banned the cultivation of GM crops.

An alternative to GMO prohibition (if that is not achievable in the given political context) is to set up a GMO contamination compensation fund. A good example of this is Portugal, which does not ban GMOs, has a unique example of GMO contamination compensating fund, which is supported by a check-off fee for GMO seed - at €4 per € 80,000.

If GMOs are allowed, and food that contains GMOs can be sold in the country, then at least compulsory GMO labelling provides the needed transparency to consumers and, by raising awareness about GMO presence in food, can incentivize consumers to choose organic products in order to avoid GMOs. Compulsory GMO labelling (above a certain threshold of GMO presence, usually at 0,9 or 1%) has been passed as a law/decreed in 64 countries (data from 2013).

¹ Full list available at http://www.gmo-free-regions.org/fileadmin/files/gmo-free-regions/full_list/List_GMO-free_regions_Europe_update_September_2010.pdf.

² Those are: Algeria, Madagascar, Turkey, Kyrgyzstan, Bhutan, Saudi Arabia, Belize, Peru, Ecuador, Venezuela, UK (for Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland), Germany (partial opt-out in order to pursue more GMO research), France, The Netherlands, Malta, Cyprus, Greece, Bulgaria, Russia, Serbia, Croatia, Italy, Denmark, Hungary, Moldova, Latvia, Lithuania, Austria, Poland, Slovenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Luxembourg, Belgium (Wallonia region), Ukraine (although there is massive GM contamination in the country), Norway and Switzerland.