New report: GM crops increase pesticide use and fail to alleviate poverty

BRUSSELS (BELGIUM), KUALA LUMPUR (MALAYSIA), LAGOS (NIGERIA),January 13th, Genetically Modified (GM) crops have led to a massive increase in pesticide use and have failed to increase yields or tackle world hunger and poverty, a new report by Friends of the Earth reveals today.

The report coincides with the annual release of biotech industry figures on GM crop cultivation around the world. Friends of the Earth International's GMO coordinator Nnimmo Bassey said: "GM crops have failed to deliver the long-promised benefits of the biotech industry. Instead, increased pesticide use has been the result and the environment and communities around the world.

The biotech industry claims that we need GM crops to tackle the food crisis. This is from 20 population. But the majority of GM crops are used to feed animals in rich countries, to produce damaging agrofuels, and don t even yield more than conventional crops.

Helen Holder, European GMO campaign coordinator said: It is now clearer than ever that the EU is right to take a precautionary approach to genetically modified crops. GM crops are not the solution to the urgent environmental and economic challenges

GM crops do not tackle hunger or poverty

- The vast majority of GM crops commercialised so far are destined for animal feed for the meat and livestock markets in rich industrialised nations rather than for feeding the poor. GM crops, as part of the intensive farming model, contribute to small farmers losing their land and livelihoods and do not alleviate poverty. [5]
- Industry often claims that genetically modified cotton (Bt cotton) has boosted overall cotton yields thus contributing to poverty alleviation for farmers. However, close examination of these claims shows that favourable weather conditions, a shift to irrigation and the introduction of improved seed that is not genetically modified explain the improved yield. Also, in several countries, farmers who paid a premium for Bt cotton seed ended up spending as much on chemical insecticides as farmers growing conventional cotton.

Overall, GM crops do not yield more than other crops

Even the US Department of Agriculture admits that no GM crop on the market has been modified to increase yields. The main factors influencing crop yield are weather, irrigation and fertilizers, soil quality and farmers management skills [6].

GMOs continue to fail in Europe

Less than 2% of the total maize grown in the EU is genetically modified [7] and five EU countries have now banned Monsanto s maize because of growing evidence of its negative environmental impact. A review of biotechnology in the European Union in 2007 confirmed that the GM crop sector is not performing well. On the other hand, green farming methods such as organic farming are creating more jobs, boosting rural economies and are safer for the environment [8].

A Question & Answer document focused on showing that GM crops do not help meet the Millennium Development Goals of halving hunger and poverty by 2015 is available here

The full report in English is available online at
http://www.eraction.org/publications/pdfs/gmos2008fullreport.pdf

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NOTES TO EDITORS:
[1] The executive summary of the report is available online at
http://www.foei.org/publications/pdfs/gmcrops2008execsummary.pdf

The executive summary of the report is available IN SPANISH online at:
http://www.foei.org/es/publications/pdfs/gmcrops2008execsummary.pdf/

The executive summary of the report is available IN FRENCH online at:
http://www.foei.org/fr/publications/pdfs/gmcrops2008execsummary.pdf/

[2] The new report launch coincides with the annual release of the "Global Status of Commercialized Biotech" report of the industry-sponsored International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications (ISAAA) which promotes GM crops as beneficial for the environment and a key solution to hunger and poverty. The GM crops industry continues to misleadingly claim that GM crops reduce pesticide use and play a role in tackling poverty and hunger.

[3] Data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture shows that from 1994 to 2005 Monsanto s Roundup Ready crops have driven a more than 15-fold increase in the use of glyphosate. In 2006 alone, glyphosate use on soybeans jumped 28 per cent from 2005 to reach almost 100 million pounds (approx 44 million kg).

Last year, a study by a Brazilian governmental agency found that the use of glyphosate increased 79,6 per cent from 2000 to 2005, much faster than the expansion in area planted to RR soya.

[4] Worldwide 58 reports of glyphosate-resistant weeds have been identified, infesting an estimated 3,251 sites covering 1 million hectares. Experts agree this is caused by continuous planting of RR crops and over-reliance on glyphosate. In Argentina in 2007 a glyphosate-resistant weed called Johnson Grass had infested over 120,000 ha. It is estimated that 25 million litres of herbicides other than glyphosate will be needed to tackle this weed,

increasing production costs of between $160 to 950 million per year.

[5] In South Africa, since the adoption of Bt cotton, the number of small cotton farmers have plummeted from 3229 in 2001/02 to just 853 in 2006/07.
In India, GM cotton is failing to address problems like increased costs of seeds and inputs leading to spiralling farmer debts and 942 documented farmer suicides in 2007 alone (to October).
Numerous conflicts between big landowners and local communities have been reported, including the shooting of a peasant farmer in Brazil by militia linked with Syngenta In Paraguay, soya expansion is associated with increasing rural poverty. 90% of soya grown is GM and up to 40% of people in rural areas living below the poverty line.

[6] Monstanto s Roundup Ready Soybeans - the most widely planted GM crop in the world do not produce higher yields than conventional soya. In fact many studies have found on average 5-10% per cent lower yields than highly similar conventional varieties.
Insect resistant Bt cotton does not have higher yields than conventional cotton:
- In the U.S., Argentina, Colombia, and Australia overall cotton yields have remained constant.
- In India and China, the yield increase is mainly due to weather conditions and production factors not related to GM technology. For example in China, the province with the highest cotton production and the highest average yield (Xinjiang), grows mostly conventional cotton, not GM Bt varieties.

[7] Only one GM crop is gown in the European Union, Monsanto s Bt maize (MON810) that is genetically modified to produce a built-in insecticide. The biotech industry announced a 77% increase in the surface area of GM crops being grown in the EU in 2007 which brings the overall surface area from less than 1% to just under 2%.