



**Biosafety issues related to GM seed contamination in Hungary in 2011:  
Science-based recommendations from the European Network of  
Scientists for Social and Environmental Responsibility (ENSSER)**

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The European Network of Scientists for Social and Environmental Responsibility (ENSSER)<sup>1</sup> is an independent scientific organization for the critical assessment of existing and emerging technologies. Among several objectives, the aims of ENSSER include the improvement of the quality of basic and regulatory science used in the risk analysis of existing and emerging technologies and their products such as genetically modified organisms, chemicals, food technologies, geo-engineering, nanomaterials, and synthetic biology, including the risk of their military use. Therefore, ENSSER has observed with growing concern the occurrence of commercial seed contamination with a genetically modified (GM) variety in Hungary this year, occurring on 950 hectares with a further 2,500 hectares also affected.<sup>2</sup> ENSSER finds it worrisome that GM contamination occurred at several locations and were reported to come from several foreign producers (Monsanto to a larger and Pioneer Hi-Bred to a smaller extent). Even more alarming is that the case occurred in a country with a moratorium against the GM crop (*MON810*) applied for authorization.

Such contamination is far not unprecedented, as it occurred worldwide in maize from accidental or deliberate illegal releases over the last fifteen years in Austria, Brazil, Chile, Croatia, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Mexico, New Zealand, Slovenia, Switzerland and the USA.<sup>3</sup> The last incident in 2010 in Germany was linked to Pioneer Hi-Bred as seed supplier and a maize variety of the NK603 genetic event, planted in seven provinces (Bavaria, Baden-Wuerttemberg, Lower Saxony and others) at areas of 2,000-3,000 hectares.<sup>4</sup> That incident showed numerous similarities to the present case in Hungary (simultaneous occurrence of contamination in a country with an effective ban on GM maize (*MON810*), at several locations, and the responsible company denying or understating the issue.

Experience gained in Spain, where *MON810* is authorized, indicates that the co-existence of organic farmig and GM crops is impossible, as investigated in Aragón and Cataluña in 2005.<sup>3</sup> This calls special attention to strict isolation distances in seed production. In that respect the example of Spain is again salient, because GM-free seed production became impossible after the authorization of *MON810* for cultivation, and in turn, the country lost its leading position in seed production. As Hungary is now the leading producer of seeds in Europe, the genetic purity of the European seed supply is at jeopardy.

The distressing case of GM seed contamination in Hungary also underlines the need for standardized and reliable sampling and analytical determination protocols. The fact that reference samples are lacking, causing possibly a chaotic situation in the official control practice, demands urgent action. This is also reflected in the fact that Monsanto has appealed to court against the Hungarian Agriculture Office.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ensser.org>

<sup>2</sup> GM maize destroyed on 950 hectares in Hungary. *Budapest Business Journal*, Jul 14, 2011

(<http://www.bbj.hu/economy/gm-maize-destroyed-on-950-hectares-in-hungary-58887>)

<sup>3</sup> Greenpeace 2007. GM Contamination Register Report. Greenpeace International, Amsterdam, the Netherlands. (<http://www.greenpeace.org/raw/content/france/presse/dossiers-documents/gm-contamination-register-repo.pdf>)

<sup>4</sup> Banned GM maize sown in Germany. *BBC World News*, Jun 7, 2010 (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10254080>)

<sup>5</sup> Szilák, J. (2011) Monsanto appeals against destruction of corn. *The Budapest Times*, Jul 23, 2011

([http://www.budapesttimes.hu/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=19839&Itemid=221](http://www.budapesttimes.hu/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=19839&Itemid=221))