

« Coexistence »: accepting or avoiding contamination?

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Who are Friends of the Earth?

- **federation of autonomous environmental organisations from all over the world**
- **in 73 countries, 31 member groups in Europe**
- **campaign for sustainable and fair societies**



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What is « coexistence »?

- **“coexistence”**: policy term for managing GMO contamination and liability
- **GM crops are not the same as conventional crops:**
 - This is recognised in EU legislation on GMOs
 - The WTO interim ruling on the GMOs dispute does not question the right of countries to adopt strict biosafety legislation or even bans, to protect the public and the environment from GMOs.
- **“coexistence” of GM and non GM crops is a new challenge due to novel genes, for example: herbicide resistance and ‘superweeds’**



What is genetic contamination?

- GMO contamination is a **new type of pollution created by industry**. It involves living and replicating organisms, and because it involves the building blocks of life (genes), is **irreversible as well as increasing over time**. It can occur at **any stage along the food chain** as a result of natural processes and human intervention: from seed production, to crop growing, to harvesting, to storage, to transport, to processing and packaging.



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The key issues

- uncontaminated food, farming and wildlife**
- the right to choose what we grow and what we eat**
- food production costs**
- rural life and biodiversity in the EU**
- competitiveness**



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The « polluter pays » principle

- enshrined in EU environmental legislation**
- costs of avoiding contamination (segregation) must be on the biotech industry and GMO farmer**
- full liability on industry and GMO farmers**



GMOs: 10 years of commercial growing...

- industry has failed to deliver**
- 30 years of research and only 2 types of trait commercially available**
- herbicide use in the US has increased**
- contamination cases are widely reported (including in Spain)**
- “feeding the world” remains a myth**



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Job creation and competitiveness: GM crops are not the answer

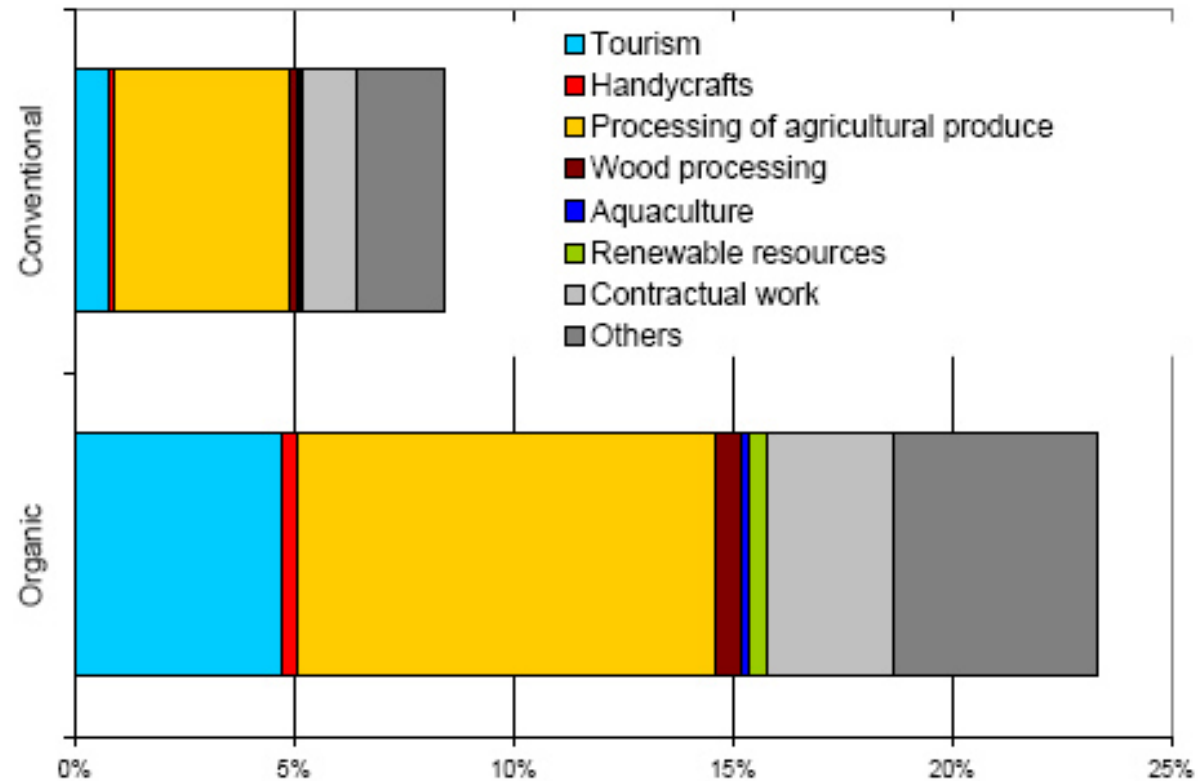
- **US share of EU maize and Canada share of oilseed rape imports now down to almost zero since GMOs introduced**
- **Countries see trade benefit in keeping export commodities non GM.**
- **“*high cost of gm-avoidance policy*” is a myth**
- **Very few green biotech jobs in Europe**
- **Organic agriculture shows economic growth, good yield, uses less water and virtually no pesticides**
- **Other sustainable agriculture projects show increased yield and contribute to poverty reduction**



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Sustainable farming in the EU

non agricultural gainful activities of organic and conventional farms in the EU in 2000
(A.M. Haring et al. 2004)



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Contaminate or legislate?

Commission policy on « coexistence »

Friends of the Earth Europe position paper:

http://www.foeeurope.org/publications/2006/contaminate_or_legislate.pdf

- **Ignores Member States' and EU Regions' wishes**
 - 50% of Member States' legal proposals on coexistence rejected
 - GMO-free Regions and Member States threatened with legal action
 - Member States not allowed to ban GMOs in ecologically sensitive areas
 - GMOs authorised under out-of-date legislation and Member State opposition ignored

- **Rejects consideration of health and environmental issues**
 - only economic aspects considered
 - evidence of environmental damage and from growing GMOs ignored



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Contaminate or legislate?

Commission policy on « coexistence »

- **Favours non mandatory measures**
 - non-mandatory coexistence measures are sufficient
 - insurance schemes for contamination should not be mandatory
 - crop segregation should not be mandatory
 - case by case approval/notification procedures rejected
 - EU-wide law rejected, “wait and contaminate” approach adopted
- **Disregards independent legal advice**
 - legal advice that 0.9% threshold is “legally irrelevant” ignored, but does not threaten legal action if Member States fix lower thresholds
 - legal opinion on Organic Regulation disregarded
- **Commission’s Joint Rresearch Centre (JRC) report (2006)**
 - bases study on « legally irrelevant » threshold (0.9)
 - Concludes that GM crops cannot be grown without either major changes to agricultural practise, or widespead GM contamination



Recommendations

- An EU-wide ban of GMOs currently authorised for cultivation and a moratorium on all GMO cultivation until an EU law preventing contamination and establishing strict liability, and allowing EU Regions to be GMO- free is in place
- In-depth stakeholder consultation on contamination and liability
- The inclusion of health and environmental aspects, and the protection of existing farming systems in “coexistence” policy
- Thresholds for coexistence and seeds to be set at “technical zero”
- A review of recent evidence on potential hazards and contamination risks of GMOs
- Research into low input and environmentally-friendly agriculture, including agri-environment initiatives
- EU and Member States to maintain a ban on Terminator Technology (GURTS)



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Summary

- **Commission is taking a “wait-and-contaminate” approach.**
- **Its vision of coexistence is at odds with**
 - Evidence of contamination in Spain and other countries
 - Legal opinion
 - Consumer opinion
 - Sustainable farming and quality food
- **The biotech industry has failed to deliver on GMOs**
- **Environmentally-friendly and economically viable farming systems exist and must be supported**

