

The Anti-GMO situation in Sweden - a fragile/fragmented but growing people's movement

The GMO situation in Sweden today

GMO crops – no commercial production in Sweden yet, but many trials – with strong support from Swedish Department of Agriculture (SJV) that has the weakest regulations for growing GMOs in the whole of Europe. The Farmers Union (LRF) has adopted a positive policy to GM crops despite a majority of its members, Swedish farmers, being against. They are pushing particularly hard new varieties of GMO potatoes, one which is said to be resistant to potato blight and a GMO potato with a changed starch content. These have been developed by a seed company, Plant Science Sweden, owned by Svalof Weibulls that is owned to 60 percent by Lantmannen and 40% by BASF. Lantmannen is a member organization of LRF concern. In addition to a 60ha GMO potato field trial SJV has approved other trials on fruit trees, sugar beets, canola and maize.

Research

Most research on GMO in Sweden is partially or wholly financed with corporate funds and is directed towards the development of new GMO crops which can be patented. Also research is ongoing at the Swedish University of Agriculture Sciences, Forestry faculty on GMO poplar trees. The two researchers have taken out a patent on these.

There are a few notable exceptions. For example research:

on gly phosate

A study was carried out by ecology student Therese Nilsson in 2005 in the Department of Biology at Lunds University. The study was requested by Lars Johansson at Kävlinge county.

Summary: The widespread and large quantitative use of glyphosate makes research on its effects very important. Some of the glyphosate ends up in waterways and ground water as a result of surface runoff. Glyphosate has considerable effects on organisms in the water even at sub-lethal concentrations. Green algae, animal plankton, mollusks and fish are affected by glyphosate. There are also some signs that the ecosystem can be disrupted by glyphosate.

on canola

This was reported in a large national newspaper, Syd Svenska. Plant ecologist Tina D'Hertefeldt at Lunds University found viable GMO canola seed after a crop was harvested 10 years earlier on Lonntorps farm. This is a new record, earlier eight year old viable seeds had been found in France. She said that this find is surprising and pointed out the problems for growing GMO crops in the future. A discussion on the possibility of alternating production of GM and conventional crops is required.

The expert at SJV Jenny Andersson said that it is well known that canola seeds can survive for long periods of time in the soil. They have therefore introduced new rules for GMO canola trials that forbid deep ploughing after harvest. The seeds shall lie close to the surface so that they grow as soon as possible. She did not know what these findings in Lonnstorps farm could have for consequences for

future commercial production of GMO canola. Within the EU there has been no application for commercial production of GMO canola and we have not drawn up any rules.

Anti-GMO initiatives in Sweden - the actors and their activities

Förbundet Sveriges Småbrukarna

The Organization of Swedish Small Farmers (FSS) has a membership of more than 6000 individuals organized in 15 local branches throughout the country. They have been working to stop the introduction of GMOs since the middle of the 1990s. Their newsletter, Smabrukaren is a very important tool in this work, providing information about attempts to bring in GMOs and initiatives among members to stop them as well as an analysis of the issues involved. Many of the local branches have organized demonstrations and seminars on the subject. In addition the editor of the newsletter is a frequent debater of GMO issues at national level and his letters and articles have been published in many local and national papers and magazines. His strategy has been to show how the national farmers union (LRF) and their companies have been one of the major promoters of GMO in the country. He has also written FSSs GMO leaflet that has been distributed in the thousands across the country by the local branches.

One of the local branches, Smabrukare i Väst, has held meetings with local farmers, informing them about GMO. This resulted in a motion to the regional LRF annual meeting that LRF change their GMO policy. This motion was defeated. This local branch of FFS has also declared their region to be a GMO-free zone.

On the 11 of October a demonstration was organized in Helsingborg against GMOs and the government's decision to permit cultivation of GMO crops. This was organized by FSS local branch in Skåne together with Friends of the Earth and several other organizations.

In addition to this work being done with the organization, FSS took the lead in arranging a seminar in 2005 that brought together many of the organizations carrying out anti-GMO initiatives, isolated from one another. This meeting was attended by Jadwiga and Julian who made an important contribution by presenting Poland's groundbreaking work with local governments to declare themselves GMO free zones. At this meeting it was decided that an effort to coordinate activities among the different organizations should be made so they could have a greater impact at national level. This decision was the basis for the People's Movement for a GMO free Sweden which was formed earlier this year.

Network GMO-free Sweden (GMO-fritt Sverige)

At present the network is being coordinated by Lasse Hellander from the Biodynamic organization. It brings together several grassroots organizations and NGOs who are against GMOs. At the moment the network is supported by 12 organisations: Föreningen Allkorn, Biodynamiska föreningen, Samodlarna i Sverige, Förbundet Organiskbiologisk odling, Future Earth (Framtidsjorden), Friends of the Earth Sweden (Miljöförbundet Jordens vänner), Greenpeace, Slowfood i Sverige, Friend Group for Centro Ecologico (Vämföreningen Latinamerikagrupperna), FSS Förbundet Sveriges Småbrukare, FIAN (Food First Information and Action Network), and The Swedish Consumer Coalition (Sveriges Konsumenter i samverkan).

Up to now the network has made press releases, prepared formal comments at request from the Department of Agriculture on EU plans to permit Monsanto's soya being used in food and fodder and on GM canola T45, organized seminars and translated international documents. The network is linked to the International Commission for Food and Agriculture chaired by Vandana Shiva and has signed the Joint Statement prepared by the International Commission and the European Network for GMO free regions and local authorities. (See Joint Statement in Appendix I.)

They are looking at the possibility to have their own website, presently information is available at <www.biodynamisk.se> and <hejdagmo.se>. Funding remains problematic.

HejdaGMO – a network to establish GMO free zones in Sweden.

This network is composed of concerned individuals who work for a common goal of creating GMO free zones in Sweden. It now has contact persons in 13 regions in Sweden who are more or less active and the network is growing. They have created a very good website with a lot of information and discussions on GMO <www.hejdagmo.se>. Much of the information is in Swedish – something that previously has been difficult to access easily. The website is moderated by Akiko Frid from Greenpeace

”Hej då GMO” is a source of inspiration for others to continue their efforts. It also closely follows GMO events in the country and internationally. The latest information is quickly found providing an important support for our work. It is important that it continues.”

So wrote the coordinator from one of the initiatives linked to the Hejdagmo network:

GMO fri Jämtland .

They (concerned individuals in different organizations) are working at

regional (län) level to make Jamtland a GMO free zone. They have been active and working with GMO issues in different constellations since the mid 90s. During the past year and a half their work has concentrated on having the counties (kommuner) and the region as a whole declared as a GMO-free zone. Two groups, members of the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation and the farmers in the region have been the main target for their work. They have attended many meetings and had good discussions with many people. Although much remains to be done one important goal has been reached. The annual meeting of the regional branch of the farmers' union (LRF) took a decision to work for a GMO-free region. At this meeting five different motions were presented demanding that the regional LRF organization support the demand to declare Jamtland region to be a GMO-free zone with the following goal: A Jamtland region where no GM crop is grown neither in fields, in gardens, in the forest nor in fieldtrials. A region where no food is produced with the help of GM crops and where no GM food is sold in our stores.

They also demanded an active engagement from the regional board of LRF. The regional government had taken a decision earlier to include a GMO-free region as one of their ten environmental goals.

Convincing the farmers to actively support this effort has been very important in giving it legitimacy. Having members of SSNC in support is equally important. Their large membership makes them an important consumer group. When they say no to GMO the farmers listen. The next group to be reached is the local politicians. They will be reached through participation in political meetings, preparing motion and citizens proposals.

The reference group for this project has included representatives from both LRF and SSNC, the two main target groups, as well as other concerned individuals. Information material has been developed. It has included a flyer that explains the issues as well as several ppt presentations for different target groups which have been updated as new facts become available.

Meetings have been important especially when they have been able to make presentations at meeting arranged by other organizations. These have included, in addition to LRF, primary, secondary and folk schools, the church and the Environment Department at the regional government. Seminars and debates have also been arranged and two major debate series in the local press, a press conference and press meeting have been held.

The work continues. Two more local LRF branches have requested information and letters have been written to politicians who have said they want to present motions. In other counties letters have been sent to politicians from all the political parties. With the letters, information about the demands of what needs to be included in the work for a GMO free county is included. These contacts are being followed up during this autumn. In addition a letter-to-the-editor campaign for a GMO-free Jamtland is being carried out. By explaining the different issues a greater understanding for their demands is reached. Also the positive decision from LRFs regional annual meeting has given them wind in their sails and lots of energy to do all the work that needs to be done. This has made the work with the local government easier. An example of a motion made by one of the local politicians is found in Appendix II

Lessons learned

- Things take time - both for the process to mature and for carrying out all the activities – and money, at least a little.
- It is possible to infiltrate the 'enemy'. The farmers union, LRF, is an important player when it comes to GMO issues in Sweden. Their decision to support GMO crops was not grounded among the grassroots members of the organization. The great majority of farmers are against GMO. This leaves the top quite vulnerable as it is possible to raise the issue and question their policy from the bottom up. This takes a lot of time and efforts. It has been important to identify individuals in the organization that are against GMOs and can benefit from outside support.
- Collaboration among organizations is difficult. Better understanding of how we can better work together for a common goal is very important. For example the new People's Movement for a GMO Sweden lacks two key players – The Organic Farmers Association and the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation. Both these organizations represent key stakeholders whose participation would greatly strengthen the movement as a whole. The explanations for why they have not signed up vary. Efforts will be made to have the regional level groups to sign up.
- Multiple strategies complement and support each other. It allows many actors to take part and reaches different groups in society. It is not a question of one being right or wrong but rather accepting that different strategies get results in different time frames. Having the Slow Food Movement in Sweden as part of the network gives very positive vibrations. Diversity is strength.

STATEMENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE and THE EUROPEAN NETWORK OF GMO-FREE REGIONS

Posted November 8th, 2007 by [admin](#)

On 4 and 5 February 2003 the International Commission on the Future of Food and Agriculture was established in Florence, with the support and active participation of the Government of the Region of Tuscany, with the aim of working to ensure that food and agriculture become more socially and ecologically sustainable, more accessible, and putting food quality, food safety and public health above corporate profits.

The principles on which the work of the Commission is based are found in the 'Florence Declaration on Global Food Rights' and further elaborated in the 'Manifesto on the Future of Food' and the 'Manifesto on the Future of Seeds.'

On November 2003 the Network of European GMO-free Regions and Local Authorities was established in Brussels and on 5 February 2005 the Network's targets and field of action were defined in Florence with the signing of the "Charter of the Regions and Local Authorities of Europe on the subject of coexistence of genetically modified crops with traditional and organic farming."

Each of these documents assert the imperative of protecting biodiversity and the rights of farmers to be GMO free, and of valorizing locally based agriculture.

Thus, the International Commission on the Future of Food and the European Network of GMO-free Regions and Local Authorities

JOINTLY DECLARE AND AFFIRM THAT:

1. All human beings on the planet have a fundamental human right to access and/or to produce sufficient food to sustain their lives and communities. Every government - regional, national, international - is obliged to guarantee this right.
2. All healthy food and agricultural systems are dependent upon the protection of the natural world, and the maintenance of earth's biodiversity. This protection must be a priority for all governments and communities and all rules should be aligned with this purpose.
3. All human beings have the right to food that is safe and nutritious. No technological interventions in food production should be permitted until proven to meet local standards of safety, nutrition, health and sustainability. The precautionary principle must apply in all matters.
4. The international rules have to be modified so that no nation could be forced to accept any foods or other agricultural imports across its borders that have been produced in this manner, or that the nation considers detrimental to public health, environment, local agriculture or cultural traditions, or for any other reason.
5. All individuals, communities and national entities have an inherent right to all relevant information about the foods they consume, the processes used to produce them, and where the food comes from, thereby ensuring their sovereign right to make informed choices regarding the safety and health of the food they consume and the safety and health of the environment. The Cartagena protocol rules must be applied.
6. The Regional Governments have the right to choose the agricultural system for their territory and to define how to protect the conventional, organic and traditional productions, safeguarding biodiversity. Moreover, they must have the freedom to prohibit OGM crops in order to avoid the contamination of local productions.
7. The agricultural systems based on the production and consumption localisation, on the respect of the food sovereignty and on the biodiversity adding to value have to be encouraged and supported.
8. The biodiversity of the Regions must be protected by measures that encourage the registration of native varieties and species in biodiversity conservation catalogues and the exploitation of these varieties and species in the farming industry, so preventing this heritage becoming patented;
9. Seeds are a gift of nature and of diverse cultures that must be passed from generation to generation. They are a common property resource, to be shared for the well being of all and saved for the well being of future generations.
10. No life form, be it plant, animal or human life, can be patented or monopolized. Every violations of dignity and 'sanctity' of life, of the principles of biodiversity, and of the legitimate inheritance of farmers and indigenous peoples worldwide must be fought according to the Convention on Biological Diversity that, at the art. 1, affirms: "The objectives of this Convention [...] are the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources".
11. Seeds are a "commons" and thus the freedom to exchange seeds among farming communities must be an inalienable right. This also includes the right to sell and to share seeds on a "non-exclusive basis".
12. Farmers must have the freedom to be free of genetic contamination and biopollution. The introduction of new varieties and plants must take into account the potential environmental risks as well as other potential detrimental agricultural effects. The 'Terminator' technology that renders

seed sterile and unable to reproduce itself is an assault on the fundamental nature of seed as the source of reproduction of life and must be banned on a global level.

On the basis of the aforementioned principles, the International Commission on the Future of Food and the European Network of GMO-free Regions and Local Authorities

UNDERTAKE TO:

- * - Promote a transformation of the agro-food system through participatory democracy, knowledgeable consumer behaviour, socially responsible enterprises and independent nutritional education on the basis of guidelines for development that contribute to combating the erosion of agricultural biodiversity, chemical and genetic pollution and contamination and global warming of the planet;
- * - Work towards the reform of international rules for food and agriculture, especially the regulations and standards of the WTO and the regulations of the FAO Agreement on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures that are in conflict with the aforementioned principles;
- * - Promote the ratification of international agreements aimed at guaranteeing the supply of high quality raw materials and seeds which are certified "GMO-free" to respect the principle of fair trade between the Northern and Southern parts of the world;
- * - Act within the framework of the European Union and national institutions in order that the procedures for the authorization of new GMO varieties be contingent upon not only respect for ethical, preventive and precautionary principles, but also proof of positive effects for consumers and society in general;
- * - Launch international alliances with the major NGOs for the purpose of urging international bodies to protect and support the rights of farmers and consumers;
- * - Commit to state the principle of zero tolerance for GMOs in organic products.

Signed on the 17th of May 2007 in Florence

The International Commission on the Future of Food and Agriculture
The President, Vandana Shiva

The Network of European GMO-free Regions and Local Authorities
The Coordinator, Susanna Cenni, Councillor for Agriculture, Tuscany Region

Appendix II

Jamtlands Region Centre Women

We are working actively for a GMO free region.

Press release 2008 05 07

Centre women in Jamtlands region are working actively for a GMO-free Jamtland and for this reason I have now presented a motion on this subject to both Ostersunds county government and the regional government in Jamtlands region. The goal is to have the all the counties in the region to declare themselves to be GMO-free zones.

The motion to Jamtlands regional government

A GMO free Jamtland region

During the past year the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC) in the region worked to spread knowledge about GMO issues among the regions farmers and consumers. This has been done because we wish to declare Jamtland to be a GMO-free zone with the following goal:

A GMO-free Jamtlands region

A Jamtlands region where no GM crops are grown in fields, in gardens, in the forest or in

field trials. A region where no food is produced with the help of GM crops and where no GM food is found in our shops.

There are several things that help such a decision being taken -

- LRF's regional annual meeting decided to demand that Jamtland region is a GMO-free zone in accordance with the text above.
 - The majority of the farmers in the region are registered with Swedish Sigill which has decided not to use GM crops. (This includes, for example, all milk producers.)
 - 60 % of the regions farmers have all or part of their fields in organic production which also demand GMO-free production.
 - The Swedish proposal for co-existence rules (the rules that regulate the existence of GMO and other crops) constitute a very weak framework in their present form which will make it difficult for both Swedish Sigill and organic farmers to remain GMO-free if the production of GM crops are permitted in the region.
 - No GM crops are presently grown in the region – neither commercially nor as research trials.
 - The regional government in Jamtlands region has included GMO-free as one of its 16 regional environmental goals.
- Jamtland och Harjedalen are two well demarkated regions.

We have a rich agriculture landscape with a fantastic biological diversity that is worth taking care of. A GMO-free zone, widely accepted among the residents, can contribute to greater interest in the food from the region and improve the competitive position of the region with its GMO-free food production.

The goal is to have all the counties in the region to declare themselves to be GMO-free zones. The EG court does not allow a general prohibition of GM crops so a decision does not give us any legal protection but it does show our intention which is very important.

In addition the regional administration can make a decision that the rules concerning purchases can demand that the food purchased is not produced with GM crops. This would guarantee GMO-free food in all of the regional organizations activities. It is also desirable that the regional authority clearly says no to commercial crop production or field trials with GMO with the regions borders.

Neither farmers nor consumers benefit from the production of GM crops. The chemical company Monsanto is the big winner as it produces over 90% of GMO crop seeds and receives an income from patents from most competitors and from all GM crop producers. The biological diversity is threatened, dependency on chemicals as well as on the company increases. Knowledge concerning health issues linked to GMO and antibiotic resistance needs further investigation by independent actors. Despite all the talk the food needs of the South have not been met through the development of new GM crops.

With the above in mind I petition

- that the regional administration supports the demand to declare Jamtlands region to be a GMO-free zone with the following goal:

A Jamtland region where no GM crops are grown in fields, in gardens, in the forest or in field trials. A region where no food is produced with the help of GM crops and where no GM food is found in our shops.

- that the regional administration decides that rules governing purchases demand that purchased foodstuff is not produced with GM crops.

- that the regional administration includes in its goals that within Jamtland regional boundaries no commercial production or field trials with GMO take place.

Bogna Wojtkiewicz Adolfsson

Member of the regional Government

Women of the Center party in Jamtlands region

Daphne Thuvesson, Organizacja Szwedzkich Rodzinnych Gospodarstw, Szwecja