



The GM Free Regions Network speaker at the Co-Extra final conference in Paris.

After 5 years of hard work the Co-Extra programme coordinated by Yves Bertheau from INRA gave its final recommendations on Gm-non-GM crop co-existence in Paris on June 2-4th 2009. This €2 million programme financed by the EU and that provides scientific evidence to the Commission for future decisions came to interesting conclusions.

According to the many research institutes, co-existence of the two crops on farm level is impossible. Yves Bertheau's coordinating work also pointed out that the minimum distance between non-GM and GM maize fields (buffer zone) should be at least 300m if not more, bearing in mind that if the legal threshold is 0.9%, non-GM maize users require a 0.1% threshold to guarantee against any adventitious contamination. Researchers concluded that the best solution to imagine co-existence would be to specialise territories as some pollens travel up to 30km.

Co-Extra also pointed out that cross-field contamination was not the only threat. Seeds are also at risk and Co-Extra recommended a 0.1% threshold. The conference conclusions also pointed, following Bernard Koch from the Innsbruck University (Austria) in charge of the legal aspects that "those who introduce a new technology should pay for the costs of segregation".

Our network, represented by Renaud Layadi, senior policy advisor from Brittany, explained the network's strategy on non-GM feed during 30 full minutes on June 4th between 16.00 and 16.30. This intervention came after Cargill's that explained that there would be no other choice but to switch to GM feed and that non-GM feed production would only be a very narrow niche market. With this our network cannot agree and we pointed out that the size of the non-GM feed using production was already between 15 and 20% and widening under the pressure of non-GM feed labelled market. During the questions strong protests were raised by the Saskatchewan University pointing out that they saw no reason in refusing GM as they were there to stay and by another scientist from the Netherlands who suggested to create "slow GM". The first intervention drew a protest from part of the other scientists who understood our networks' objections to GM, the second one laughs as every one understood that there was no need for "slow GM"... Mother Nature doing the job perfectly already.

As a conclusion, the teams praised Yves Bertheau's work. As for us we can only agree to the conclusions that strengthen the debate on non-GM regions and that draws attention on the vital necessity to protect seeds from any contamination. Brittany for the GM Free Network joined the appraisal for this open minded (and Breton) team leader.

Renaud Layadi

Co-Extra's website : <http://www.coextra.eu/>