Veille citoyenne d'information sur les OGM et les semences

Europe: transgenic crops never stop dying

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Figures for the area under MON810, the only transgenic GMO crop authorized for cultivation, have just been published in the European Union. And it’s a downward spiral: a third less than last year. In Spain, as in Portugal, the transgenic surface area has fallen below 100,000 hectares for both countries combined.

In 2016, MON810 corn, genetically modified to produce an insecticide against the borer, was grown on 136,338 hectares (ha) in four European countries... That was the last year that Slovakia and the Czech Republic were sowing it [1]. Since then, in Spain and Portugal, the surfaces have literally collapsed [2] [3].

Evolution of transgenic areas between 2021 and 2022

	2021	2022
Spain	96,606 ha	67,620 ha (-30%)
Portugal	4,321 ha	2,290 ha (-47%)
EU	100,927 ha	69,910 ha (-31%)

These transgenic crops also represent a very small percentage of the overall maize area in these two countries. According to Eurostat, Spain cultivated, , in 2022, 314,700 hectares of grain maize and 108,170 hectares of "*green*" maize (mainly for silage), i.e. a total of 422,870 hectares... and Portugal cultivated 78,190 hectares and 71,060 hectares, i.e. a total of 149,250 hectares [4]. For example, MON810 maize represents 16% of the Spanish maize crop and 1.5% of the Portuguese crop. In 2014, MON810 maize accounted for 32% of the Spanish maize crop.

One GMO may conceal another

These figures may partly explain the current debate on new GMOs in the European Union. The European Commission, the agri-seed industry, and the major agricultural unions, such as the (French) FNSEA and its European counterpart Copa-Cogeca, are mobilizing to deregulate GMO plants produced with other, so-called "*new*", techniques of genetic modification (directed mutagenesis, cisgenesis). The stakes are high for them. Under the current regulations that provide a certain transparency, it is difficult for trangenic GMOs to obtain an authorization for cultivation (many are authorized for import). To date, only MON810 corn was authorized for cultivation. This transparency has also allowed breeders, farmers and consumers, as far as possible, to refuse to cultivate and buy transgenic crops. The figures we mention in this article confirm the lack of enthusiasm for MON810 corn varieties.

But in the absence of evaluation, authorization, labeling... GMOs could spread in the fields and end up on our tables more easily, without encountering any opposition.

Currently, some GMOs resulting from random mutagenesis techniques applied to isolated cells cultivated *in vitro* are already being sown, in the greatest opacity, in European fields. The Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) has declared that these GMOs must be regulated like transgenic GMOs. But the European and national authorities have not taken any measures to regulate them. On the contrary, they seek by all means to prevent the strict application of the 2018 decision of the CJEU [5].

What about transgenic areas internationally?

At the international level, it is more difficult to get a sense of the actual situation in the fields. Curiously, the Isaaa, a pro-GMO organization that has been scrupulously recording the transgenic surfaces in the world since 1996, stopped this work in 2020. Its last report therefore mentions 2019 the surfaces. This report noted a slight decrease, between 2018 and 2019, of 1.3 million hectares (-0.7%), from 191.7 million hectares to 190.4 million hectares [6].

Inf'OGM strives, within the limits of transparency of figures, to follow this evolution. But the authorities and the agro-seed industries are reluctant to answer us. The few data collected do not show a spectacular increase in the area cultivated with transgenic GMOs. The most notable increase is in Africa. Recently, several countries have authorized transgenic GMOs and are starting to cultivate them. The information that we have managed to obtain, often thanks to the notes of the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), can be seen on this page: https://www.infogm.org/4740.

[1] Christophe NOISETTE, « UE : seule la péninsule ibérique cultive des OGM transgéniques », *Inf'OGM*, 24 October 2016

[2] Ministerio de Agricultura, Pesca y Alimentación: “Estimación superficie cultivada de maíz MON 810 por provincias”

[3] Direção-Geral de Alimentação e Veterinária: “Cultivo de milho geneticamente modificado em 2022”

[4] Eurostat, “Grain maize and ’corn-cob-mix’ by area, production and moisture” and “Corn silage by area, production and moisture”, November 11, 2022

[5] Eric MEUNIER, « OGM : la CJUE va-t-elle confirmer son arrêt de 2018 ? », *Inf'OGM*, 1 November 2022

[6] Christophe NOISETTE, « OGM transgéniques : moins de 4 % des terres agricoles mondiales », *Inf'OGM*, 6 September 2022

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