



Planned US control of SA seed supply threatens food security

There was much jubilation in November last year when the proposed merger between the multi-national Pioneer Hi-Bred and the South African seed company Pannar Seed (Pty) Ltd was rejected by the Competition Commission because of its anti-competitive nature.

Biowatch, one of the objecting parties, was concerned this merger would effectively put control of most of South Africa's seed supply into the hands of two US held multi-nationals, Pioneer Hi-Bred and Monsanto. This situation would pose a distinct danger to both South Africa's food security and seed sovereignty. We also had concerns about the competitive issues raised by this merger because of the increasing concentration of market-share in the local seed market, particularly in maize, the most profitable sector.

This jubilation was, however, short-lived as the parties planning the merger appealed the decision at the Competition Tribunal in December 2010. The would-be merging parties have a formidable legal team with massive resources behind them, whilst the other parties granted limited intervention rights, namely Biowatch South Africa, the African Centre for Biosafety (ACB) and the Food and Allied Workers Union (FAWU), are all not-for-profit organisations with limited resources.

The Competition Tribunal is due to hear the appeal in the second half of 2011. We will keep Biowatch Bulletin readers informed of further developments.



Food security under threat?

Call to Commission to investigate Monsanto

In May 2011, the African Centre for Biosafety (ACB), the Surplus People Project (SPP), Trust for Community Outreach and Education (TCOE), the Food Sovereignty Campaign, and Biowatch South Africa, called on the Competition Commission to investigate Monsanto's "extraordinary market power" in South Africa.

We will keep readers informed as the matter progresses.

SANBI's "Monitoring the Environmental Impacts of GM Maize in South Africa" report, 1st environmental impact study of a GM crop in South Africa.



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• See page 2

UN officials, government delegates, representatives of big business, and members of civil society organisations from around the world, will converge in Durban 28 November to 10 December for UNFCCC's COP17.

• See page 3

Biowatch comments on the Department of Environmental Affairs' climate change response Green Paper. Comments focus on GM crops and GM trees.



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From the director

2011 is proving to be an interesting year! It started with the appeal by Pioneer Hi-Bred and Pannar Seed against the Competition Commission's ruling that their merger would not be allowed. This matter now sits with the Competition Tribunal and we hope that the strong arguments put forward against the merger by the Commission and civil society groups will be upheld.

In February, Biowatch was represented at the World Social Forum in Dakar, where we ran a workshop titled "Industrial Agriculture and Green Revolution models are not needed for Food Security". We'll take this forward at the UN Climate Change COP 17 meeting in Durban at the end of November, where an agro-ecological approach will be promoted as a form of community resilience against global food shortages, poverty and climate change impacts. Myths around genetically modified "climate-ready crops" being able to save us from these crises will need to be dispelled!

We also participated in Oxfam Australia's Economic Justice Reflection Week in Jakarta in May, where several partner organisations were represented.

At a local level, we have been busily engaged in an interesting monitoring and evaluation process of our rural-based projects, for which the baseline study has just been completed. It's been hard work, but great fun, and will be something that all parties can benefit from.

Another highlight has been the recent agro-ecology training week for Biowatch community facilitators. This included attending an agricultural show, and visits to farms showing best practice in agro-ecology and organic farming, as well as going to a rural community that has opened a new market for their produce.

We cover more about these and other Biowatch activities in the rest of the newsletter.

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SA GM update:

First environmental impact study of a GM crop in SA

Although GM crops (maize, cotton and soya) have been grown commercially in South Africa since 1997, shockingly, until the release of SANBI's "Monitoring the Environmental Impacts of GM Maize in South Africa" report in January 2011, no study had been done on the environmental impacts of a GM crop in South Africa.

The SANBI (South African National Biodiversity Institute) study was an outcome of the 5-year South Africa Norway Environmental Biosafety Co-operation Project (EBCP), initiated by the Department of Environmental Affairs and administered by SANBI and the Directorate of Nature Conservation in Norway. The study made several key findings, many of which relate to the significant development of resistance by the insect that the GM maize is meant to control (see www.sanbi.org).

Labelling of GMOs from October 2011

In April 2011, regulations to the Consumer Protection Act were published, and will become enforceable from 1 October. All goods (food) containing 5% or more of GM crop substances will have to carry a label clearly stating "contains Genetically Modified Organisms". If goods contain less than 1% GMOs, then a label stating that the product "does not contain Genetically Modified Organisms" can be used.

Although at first glance this seems a positive development, it does need to be noted that 5% of a food is not a negligible amount if most of the product is made up of water or oil! "Does not contain GMO" is misleading for consumers who may think they are not consuming GM food when this is not necessarily the case!

Monsanto's new GM maize seed factory – further contamination of Africa's traditional maize?

In April 2011 Monsanto opened a GM maize seed processing plant in Lichtenburg in the North West Province. The purpose of this facility is to produce seeds for export, largely to the rest of Africa. Kobus Lindeque, MD of Monsanto for sub-Saharan Africa, had this to say: "This facility at Lichtenburg will make a massive impact on the future of agriculture." (Business Day, 28 April 2011).

But is this really what Africa needs? There is an ever-increasing number of studies on GM crops that highlight environmental and health concerns, together with issues of crop contamination and the impact on farmers' rights. This calls for a full public investigation!

UNFCCC COP17 climate change circus comes to Durban

From 28th November to 10th December 2011 there will be a massive convergence of UN officials, government delegates, representatives of big business, and members of civil society organisations from around the world in Durban. It is expected that up to 50 000 people will be coming to town!

The core activity in Durban will be the 17th so-called "Conference of Parties" of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC COP17). While governments will be continuing with formal discussions on the "Cancun decisions" produced at COP16 held in Mexico last year, large numbers of ordinary people will be taking

part in a different programme focusing on the issue of climate justice for communities and ecosystems in the South that are suffering the consequences of industrial proliferation and wasteful consumption in the North.

Associated issues that will be debated include carbon trading and offsets, which are promoted by the UNFCCC but considered a false solution for victims of climate change!

For information on the civil society committee for COP 17 (C17), formed to facilitate and co-ordinate joint actions for COP 17, go to www.timberwatch.org.za or e-mail C17SouthAfrica@gmail.com.

Biowatch comments on SA's climate change response Green Paper

During 2010 the Department of Environmental Affairs released the draft Green Paper for public comment (see www.environment.gov.za/HotIssues/2010/cgreenpaper.pdf). Earlier this year Biowatch submitted two key concerns with respect to the Green Paper.

These concerns related to genetically engineered/modified crops, and forests as greenhouse gas sinks:

- **Concern 1: Are genetically engineered/modified crops proposed as a strategy in the Green Paper?**

There is mention of "developing climate resistant crop varieties" (Key Adaption Sector – Agriculture, page 11, item 5.2.2); "promoting the practice of conservation tillage" (item 5.2.3); and prioritisation within the country's research and development system of "new and drought resistant seed varieties" (Human Settlements, Infrastructure and the Built Environment – Rural Areas", page 28, item 5.9.14). If these refer to developing or using genetically engineered/ genetically modified crops, then this as a strategy is challenged and strongly opposed.

There is much evidence to show the negative socio-economic, health and environmental impacts of genetically engineered/modified crops. These crops also form part of an "industrial agriculture model", a model that has contributed and continues to contribute to the multiple global crises of food, energy and climate change.

- **Concern 2: Forests or Timber Plantations?**

The statement "Forests are greenhouse gas sinks" (Commercial Forestry, page 23) is confusing, when "forests" and "timber plantations" are conflated. Forests are greenhouse gas (carbon) sinks, but plantations which consist of only one type of tree, e.g. pine or gum, which will be cut down when mature, cannot be seen as effective carbon sinks. The department must distinguish between the two – preserving (and using) forests is an effective strategy, but timber plantations, particularly at the scale they are in this country, and with their concomitant social and environmental problems, are not.

Although there is no reference to genetically engineered/ genetically modified (GE/GM) trees in the Green Paper, there is a real danger that GE trees will feature in future SA climate change response strategies. Northern governments are already actively engaged in experiments with GE trees. Cold resistant GE eucalyptus trees have been planted in the US, and low-lignin poplar trees, intended for use in biofuel production, have been planted in Europe. For more information on the issue of tree plantations, visit www.timberwatch.org.za.



Biowatch is a member of the Timberwatch Coalition.

Promoting agro-ecology



Biowatch's annual agro-ecology facilitator's training week was attended by 12 KZN community farmers. A range of agro-ecological techniques, livestock diversity and marketing options were explored.



Industrial Agriculture and Green Revolution models are not needed for food security

IDEX/Biowatch South Africa workshop

Wednesday, 9 February | 16h00 - 19h00 | Venue to be confirmed
For information: SMS Lawrence Mkhalihi | +27 74 688 7854

Come and share your views and help plot a way forward
– away from Industrial Agriculture and AGRA

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Lawrence Mkhalihi, Biowatch agro-ecology specialist, presented a workshop at the World Social Forum in Dakar in February. Participants shared their experiences of the threats to food security posed by industrial agriculture.



Selinah Mncwango, a long-standing Ngwavuma farmer who has worked with Biowatch for many years, spoke about her traditional crops and saving seeds at a national agro-ecology workshop in May. (Photo by Surplus People Project).



Mapping their homesteads – community members in Tshaneni, KwaZulu-Natal, developing the baseline study for Biowatch's three year monitoring and evaluation process.

WHAT'S COMING UP?

- ABN (African Biodiversity Network) partners' meeting – Kenya, June 2011
- Workshop: Supporting agro-ecology and exploring effective markets – Scottburgh, August 2011
- COP 17 Climate Change Summit – Durban, 28 November to 10 December 2011
- Rio+20 People's Summit for Social and Environmental Justice" – Rio de Janeiro, June 2012

Biowatch Bulletin will keep you updated. If you would like to join our e-mailing list, please e-mail your details to biowatch@mweb.co.za

Biowatch at SACAU conference

Biowatch was invited to give a paper at the recent Southern African Confederation of Agricultural Unions (SACAU) policy conference on GMOs. SACAU represents farmers' unions across the Southern African region, from smallholder farmers' unions to the larger, commercial farmers' unions. Biowatch's paper "GM agriculture – promises or problems for farming in South Africa?" was an exposé of the problems around GMOs – from global to local. The presentation was well received and generated much debate, but was not uncontroversial, especially given the presence of a strong industry support lobby. The silence from industry about the increasing published scientific proof of shortcomings and concerns around GM technology was notable!