



bio watch

SOUTH AFRICA

biodiversity | food sovereignty | biosafety | social justice

bulletin

DECEMBER 2012

Foods that change the world

World Slow Food communities gather

The international Slow Food exhibition and conference, Salone del Gusto and Terra Madre, took place in Turin, Italy at the end of October.

The theme of the 2012 fair, organised by Slow Food International, was "Foods that change the world".



Lawrence Mkhalihi, Biowatch Agro-Ecology Manager who attended the conference, said: "It was such a privilege to be a delegate at this year's event, and to be among such inspiring and responsible farmers and producers."

Over 16 000 delegates and members of the public attended the fair, including responsible food producers, small-scale farmers, food community representatives and youth from all over the world. Arriving with their stories, products and passion for healthy, responsibly produced food, they presented a one-of-a-kind experience of the world of food and wine, allowing visitors to discover different cultures and the knowledge and skills behind food production that offers a better future.

Zilethile Madonsela (left) and Sophiwe Dlamini, Biowatch project participants, had the opportunity to prepare a traditional meal for delegates – traditional chicken, peanut soup, Jugo beans and dumplings. (Below) The "1000 Gardens in Africa" exhibit showcased a traditional African garden based on agro-ecological principles.



"Blue" mealies handed out by the Dept. of Agriculture. Biowatch has sent the seeds for GMO



testing. A recent study records the dangers of eating GMOs.

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The National Heirloom Expo and World Pure Food Fair in the US in September was the largest



international gathering in pure food history.

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We're very pleased to announce the release of our new short video "No Seeds, No Future".



The video was filmed by Biowatch staff in Mtubatuba.

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From the director

Since our July Newsletter, Biowatch has had two exciting visits abroad – the first was a partner visit to the United States organised by IDEX (International Development Exchange), the second was a visit to Terra Madre in Italy, organised by Slow Food Italy and local partner, Surplus People Project. In the US, highlights were participation in food sovereignty events, a Heritage Seed Festival and a visit to AGRA Watch, the organisation that keeps a much needed critical eye on AGRA (The Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa).

The SA Department of Agriculture has drafted a national agro-ecology strategy, which Biowatch has made a detailed submission on (see www.biowatch.org.za). Contributions to this draft already included input by industry and agricultural research institutions, but not from civil society and farmers!

In August, with partner organisations PACSA and Enaleni Farm, we made presentations at the Association of South African Agricultural Educators (ASAAE) KZN provincial conference. The Biowatch presentations were on “Agro-ecology in practice” and “What are GMOs?”. In the past two months there has been much discussion about the impact of GMOs, particularly with the release of the Seralini *et al.* study in September (see opposite).

Also in August we ran a very successful four-day workshop on “Marketing: Steps and processes for getting value from surplus production” where the 34 participants delved into and debated issues such as alternative markets, farmers’ rights to develop and save seeds, savings schemes and labelling.

In our community work, we ran an “understanding markets” workshop and participated in several seed festivals. We are pleased to announce that a short video (filmed by Biowatch staff) is now available – see page 4.

Lastly, we wish everyone all the best for the festive season and for 2013.

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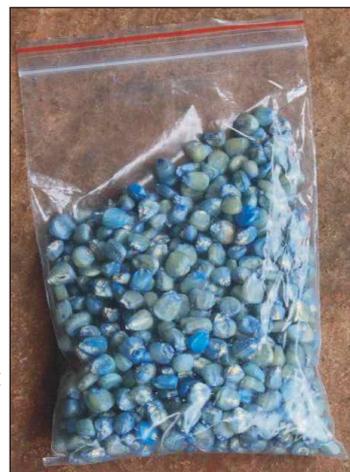
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Dangers of eating GM maize recorded

A report on the long-term toxicity of a Roundup herbicide and a Roundup-tolerant GM maize has generated intense debate on the safety of Monsanto’s GM maize NK603. The report released findings of a two-year rat feeding study led by Prof. Seralini of the University of Caen, France.

The study shows that long-term consumption of NK603 causes tumours as well as liver and kidney damage in laboratory rats. Shocking results considering over 70% of our maize, the staple food of millions of people in SA is genetically modified. NK603 is widely planted and was approved in SA for human consumption ten years ago!

This is the first study to examine the long-term effects of consuming GM foods. Trials typically only last for 90 days – not nearly enough time to even begin seeing let alone measuring long-term effects. You can download a copy of the report at www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0278691512005637.



“Blue” mealies, handed out at a Department of Agriculture event in Mtubatuba. Biowatch has sent the seeds to be tested for GMOs.

Warning lights!

A high level Renewable Energy Conference, organised by the Eastern Cape Provincial Government and the European Union (EU), took place in East London in November. The aim of the conference was to raise awareness of renewable energy opportunities in the Eastern Cape and to establish partnerships in renewable energy between players from the European Union and the Eastern Cape.

Sound good? But what if the so-called renewable energy sources were to be industrial-scale biomass and biofuel plantations? Where would the land come from? How would rural livelihoods and water resources be impacted upon? Could these be like the industrial sugar and timber plantations of other provinces that have pushed people off the land and destroyed biodiversity? There must be on-going scrutiny of this process.



Delegates at the August Biowatch agro-ecology farming workshop which focused on marketing surplus production.

Marketing surplus production An agro-ecology farming workshop

“Marketing: Steps and processes for getting value from surplus production” was the theme of the Biowatch agro-ecology farming workshop held in August.

The workshop, which took place in Scottburgh, KwaZulu-Natal, was attended by 34 farmers, activists, NGO staff and academics.

Biowatch organised the event to explore with others ways to better support the efforts of small-scale farmers to market their surplus produce. Topics included: the potential value of establishing community-based production and distribution co-operatives; labelling produce grown using agro-ecology principles; the potential contribution of savings clubs; and the value of alternative markets for produce grown by small-scale farmers.



(Above) The workshop included a field trip to a Kumnandi collection point at the Siyavuna Development Centre where participants had the opportunity to view carefully selected seed.

GMO-free festivities

Biowatch wishes all our project participants and supporters a happy, healthy festive season! Let’s all try and make this a GMO-free celebration – and a celebration of locally and responsibly grown, fresh, in-season produce!

(Below) At another marketing workshop, this time run by EMG at Dumazulu Lodge in Hluhluwe in September, participants explored marketing related issues including alternative markets and pricing. They also deepened their understanding of such topics as the economy, exchange rates, and why the petrol price fluctuates.



World Pure Food Fair

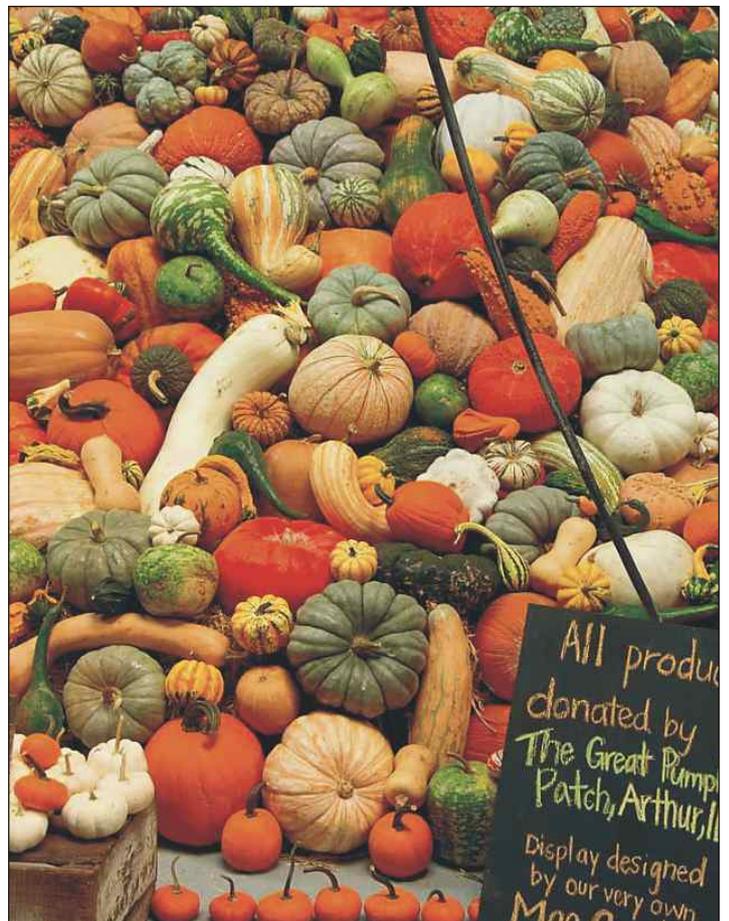
The National Heirloom Exposition and World Pure Food Fair is a not-for-profit event centered around the pure food movement, heirloom vegetables and anti-GMO activism.

The annual event took place this year in September, in Santa Rosa, California, and was attended by over 14 000 people from all over the world. With more than 70 speakers and 250 natural food vendors, the event was the largest gathering in pure food history!

Lawrence Mkhalihi, Biowatch Agro-Ecology Manager, attended the event and gave a presentation on "Household Seed Banks, Traditional Seed and Farmers' Rights in South Africa". The presentation was well attended, and sparked debate and discussion about South Africa's lack of policy to protect traditional seeds.

"It was wonderful to interact with 'seed-savers' from all over the world," said Lawrence. "The diversity in the displays of heirloom seeds and produce was incredible!"

Income generated through sales at the fair was donated back to school gardens and food programmes.



This incredible display of pumpkins, squash and gourds grown from heirloom seeds, was donated by The Great Pumpkin Patch and Homestead Seeds, Illinois, USA.



Biowatch staff and Board members at the July Oxfam launch of the Biowatch video.

No Seeds, No Future



This is the story of how a community market garden, developed using agro-ecological methods, has helped a small farming community in KwaHhohho, KwaZulu-Natal, secure their food sovereignty and save their natural seeds and traditional farming culture. Watch the video on our website or contact us to order a free copy.

WHAT'S COMING UP?

- Launch of Biowatch's latest publication "Securing Access to Justice and Information: Biowatch's Legal Battle with the South African State and Monsanto – The Inside Story": Johannesburg, 18 March 2013.
- BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) Summit: Durban, 26-27 March 2013.

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

World Food Day

On international World Food Day, 16 October, Biowatch supported two community celebrations and participated in the Diakonia Council of Churches' World Food Day event.

The community events, which took place in Mtubatuba and in Tshaneni, KwaZulu-Natal, were attended by members of the community, representatives from the local municipality, and project participants.

Guests were treated to a lunch of traditional dishes in celebration of community farmers and local, healthy food.