

Maize surplus eyed for biofuel

With the current claimed maize surplus, the South African government is being urged to reconsider its decision not to subsidise large scale industrial biofuel production (agrofuels). The current no-subsidies position forms part of the National Biofuel Strategy, based on food security issues and the needs of the people of our country.

Questions must be asked: Who is pushing for the change? Who wants maize to be used as a feedstock for biofuel? Whose interests are being looked after? It is certainly not the small-scale farmers, and it is not in the interests of food or energy security for the country. It's large-scale industrial maize farmers who want this; it's the multinational seed companies that want this.

Least economical and most wasteful option

It should be noted that ethanol (biofuel) derived from maize is one of the least economical and most wasteful forms of liquid fuel. There is no guarantee that there will be a maize surplus in years to come, so money invested in biofuel factories by the South African government could be wasted. Something else to consider: if large-scale farmers were planting GM-free maize, perhaps other countries would want to buy their surplus!

Biowatch is monitoring this important issue and will keep you updated in the Biowatch Bulletin.

Right: One of the family farmers who participated in Biowatch's diverse agriculture programme in the Eastern Cape. Mealies (maize) grown by this community were tested in a lab and are GM-free!

SA update: GM sugar and GM-free maize

In South Africa, besides the approval of the commercial release of types of GM maize, GM soya bean and GM cotton, there has also been the approval of field trials. An application has recently been made for field trials of GM sugar cane by the South African Sugar Research Institute, which has applied for new field trials of GM sugar cane. Variety NCo310 is to be engineered for increased sucrose, decreased/increased starch, and an increase in the contents of a cell wall constituent – not the sugar that one wants to be eating!

Meanwhile, the KZN Provincial Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Development has signed an agreement with South African Breweries involving farming communities from Bergville, Mbabazane and Indaka for the production of GM-free yellow maize.



Rural women are fighting poverty and providing for their families through household and community food gardens – Biowatch's US intern reflects.



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Traditional knowledge remains unprotected by the pending Intellectual Property Amendment



Bill which is currently under discussion nationally.

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International update: Biowatch's "No to GM" message goes international; Biodiversity, access



and benefit sharing – what happened in Nagoya, Japan?

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From the director

"Consolidation" and "moving forward" have been key words for Biowatch in 2010! The long legal battle with the Department of Agriculture and Monsanto has ended, with the matter being settled by the Department of Agriculture – the Legal Resources Centre and Biowatch both being paid their legal costs according to the set legal tariffs.

We welcomed two new members to our Board of Trustees: Herschelle Milford, Director of Surplus People Project (SPP) and Thoko Makhanya of the Women's Leadership and Training Programme (WLTP) and long-standing anti-GM activist.

New funders have come to support Biowatch's work – Oxfam Australia and Comic Relief. We have had ongoing support and collaboration with our existing funders – the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, the Ford Foundation, UNDP-GEF, the DG Murray Trust, and IDEX (International Development Exchange). We thank our funders and all of you for your support.

Our understanding of agro-ecology and its antithesis, industrial agriculture and GM crops, has deepened and strengthened over the year, at the local and international level, through exchange visits and participation in workshops.

Biowatch's work in the rural areas has expanded and, for the first time, includes assistance to secure household gardens (through fencing and other protective measures). We also arranged training in leadership skills, marketing of surplus produce, and the participatory guarantee system (PGS) for project members. Farmer exchanges and seed festivals continue to be among our highlights for the year.

We hope that you enjoy a glimpse of these wide-ranging activities in this newsletter!

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(Above) Biowatch Board members, from left to right: Thoko Makhanya, Rachel Wynberg, Nombulelo Siqwana-Ndulo, David Fig, Rose Williams and Herschelle Milford. (Inset) Dot Keet, Board member and photographer!

(Below) Biowatch intern Melanie Foreman with Edwin Lehasa, a visiting farmer from the Lesotho-based group Kopano Ke Matla, and Lawrence Mkhalihi, Biowatch.



US intern reflects

Through IDEX (International Development Exchange), Melanie Foreman, a graduate student at San Francisco State University, was linked to Biowatch.

"In my short time as a Biowatch intern, I was able to see many different aspects of the organisation's work," she said. "My most memorable experience was meeting with women in rural Tshaneni. It was incredible to see the ways in which they provide for their families. Their biggest challenges are a lack of access to water and jobs, but, by participating in the Biowatch project, they are able to fight poverty and save money through household and community food gardens. Agro-ecological methods have improved household food production and training from Biowatch has resulted in the use of less water and improved plant performance. In addition, seed saving helps the families save money and preserve cultural heritage."

"In my few months with Biowatch, I learned not only about the impacts of food insecurity around the world, but also about the incredible work being done 'on the ground' in South Africa by grassroots organisations such as Biowatch."



Household food gardens and seed sharing in the Umkhanyakude District in KwaZulu-Natal: (Top left) Much jubilation as fencing and poles are delivered to secure household food gardens in Tshaneni; (Centre) A "secured" household food garden in a KwaHhohho homestead; (Top right) Seeds of 18 species of traditional crops were offered by local family farmers for sharing and exchange at a recent Farmer Exchange and Seed Blessing Ceremony held at KwaHhohho.

Traditional knowledge unprotected by Intellectual Property Amendment Bill

Biowatch has been involved in discussions to protect traditional knowledge since as far back as 1998, when we made submissions on an Indigenous Knowledge Bill and the inappropriateness of using intellectual property rights law to protect traditional knowledge. These concerns are equally valid now.

"The Intellectual Property Amendment Bill, which is currently under discussion by Parliament's Trade and Industry Portfolio Committee, is steeped in a western

mode of thinking about intellectual property, which focuses on monopolistic, individualised and time-bound rights with a focus on commercialisation," says Biowatch Trustee, Rachel Wynberg.

"This Bill does not recognise that traditional knowledge is often held collectively, for the public good, and is constantly evolving, adaptive, and dynamic. Moreover, the Bill does not consider the unique circumstances of traditional knowledge associated with biodiversity and the natural environment."

Monsanto's tentacles in our schools

Monsanto recently donated half a million rand to in-service training for Western Cape primary science teachers.

Biowatch's experience with Monsanto makes us highly suspicious of the neutrality of this donation to the Primary Science Programme (PSP). We believe Monsanto will use its influence to try to provide teachers with misleading information on science and agriculture, to soften up the recipients of the donation into acceptance of genetically modified crops, and to promote the company's interests in spreading GMO technology.

Primary teachers – beware! Please consult the Biowatch website and links for an alternative vision of how to provide information to strengthen farming communities through more sustainable agricultural practices. Let us know if you are asked to make propaganda for Monsanto.

The IP Amendment Bill will set up an unimplementable legal framework that will counter attempts to protect traditional knowledge. We will keep you updated of developments.

For more information see: http://us-cdn.creamermedia.co.za/assets/articles/attachments/27226_100422b8-10.pdf.



Representatives from each of the Biowatch projects came together with Biowatch staff and associates in October to plan the programme for the next three years. It was a most significant event!

Brazil Farmer Exchange

The third and final IBSA farmer exchange took place earlier this year in Paraiba, Brazil. This was part of the IBSA (India-Brazil-South Africa) civil society partnership between Agro-ecology and Family Farming (AS-PTA) in Brazil, Chetna Organic Farmers' Association in India, and Surplus People Project (SPP) and Biowatch in South Africa.

This was an inspiring exchange, which was followed by a seminar on seed management.

Biowatch's Lawrence Mkhaliphi said he saw his "ideal agro-ecological farm" in Brazil. Highlights for Sophiwe Dlamini, a Biowatch-associated farmer, included the water harvesting techniques, the community seed banks, and the records and photographs kept for each farmer to monitor progress.



The recent Brazil GMO Seminar took place in August in the aftermath of the Soccer World Cup. Soccer "fever" was still evident throughout Brazil, illustrated in bright Rio street art. Organised by ASP-TA, Biowatch's Rio-based IBSA partner, the seminar focused on the political economy of cotton (India), soya (Brazil), maize (South Africa), and on biosafety legislation and campaign strategies. Papers from this seminar are available on our website, www.biowatch.org.za.

Key international meetings in Nagoya, Japan

Two key international meetings recently took place in Nagoya, Japan. Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety held their 5th meeting (MOP5), while parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) held their 10th meeting (COP10).

Mariam Mayet, Director of the African Centre for Biosafety, comments on the Nagoya-Kuala Lumpur Supplementary Protocol on Liability and Redress to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (also known as the Supplementary Protocol): "The Supplementary Protocol is a far cry from what most of the developing countries, concerned scientists, small-holder farmers and NGOs had campaigned for. Instead of an international civil liability regime that establishes rules and procedures for redress on the part of third parties for damage arising from GMOs, the Supplementary Protocol comprises of a set of administrative measures that Parties

to such a Protocol would need to legislate for and implement. Nevertheless, the existence of the Supplementary Protocol does signal the willingness of the international community to acknowledge that GMOs cause harm to biodiversity and that measures would have to be taken to clean up."

Meanwhile, negotiators were caught up in wrangles about a new Protocol for Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS) under the Convention on Biological Diversity. This international agreement will set in place new rules for bioprospecting – the exploration of commercially valuable genetic and biochemical properties. At the time of going to press, the six-year negotiation process had finally culminated in the adoption of the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing. (See <http://ictsd.org/downloads/2010/11/abs-protocol.pdf>).

WHAT'S COMING UP?

- Participatory guarantee system community workshop – November 2010
- Farmer exchange visit: Pongola to Ngwavuma – December 2010
- World Social Forum in Dakar – February 2011

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 in Detroit

Biowatch was represented at the June 2010 US Social Forum in Detroit where, for the first time at an international level, we presented our recent court case victory over the State and Monsanto. During our well-attended presentation, we handed out Biowatch's "NO2GM" beaded pins which soon became popular delegate "accessories"!

