

Diversity for all! Liberation of our Seeds

Declaration of the 3rd European Seed Seminar, 18 – 20 May in Halle/Saale (Germany)

The experiments with genetically modified plants in the laboratories and in the fields of the Institute of Plant Genetics and Crop Plant Research (IPK) in Gatersleben, one of the biggest collections of crop plants, gave 150 farmers, gardeners, breeders, gene bank representatives and initiatives for the preservation and utilization of biodiversity - from 25 countries and four continents - cause to meet in Halle from 18th to 20th of May.

These trials mean that the gene bank of the IPK in Gatersleben, a publicly funded institution, is no longer fulfilling its original purpose. Instead of safely preserving the diversity of cultivated plants the IPK is exposing the collection to the threat of GMO-contamination. The gene bank in Gatersleben is not the only example indicating that industrialised countries no longer consider it their primary task to preserve and to protect the diversity of cultivated plants and domestic animals as such. In many countries, gene banks are reducing their collections of varieties of cultivated plants or abandoning entire collections, just because they consider the species or varieties concerned have no economic relevance at the moment or they are claiming they lack money for this.

This development has grave consequences for all of us. The governments of the rich countries bear a responsibility in this matter that reaches far beyond their borders. The gene banks, like Gatersleben, were set up to accommodate collections from all countries of the world, collected mainly during the course of the colonial occupation of these countries. Today they are funded from peoples' taxes. However, the Governing Board of the Institute of Plant Genetics and Crop Plant Research (IPK) justifies the genetic engineering experiments in Gatersleben with the argument that the plant collections are now the property of the gene bank which can therefore decide what to do with them.

That is the focus of our protest. During about 10.000 years of agriculture an almost inexhaustible wealth has emerged: Countless species, races and varieties of crop plants and domestic animals form the living cultural heritage of humanity. Its preservation underpins our future food. This heritage belongs to all human beings, respecting the collective rights of the communities which have selected it and made it available for us. We support the lawsuit against the Federal Agency of Consumer Protection and Food Security. Yet juridic measures alone are not sufficient.

All around the world people have begun to resist the privatization of their biological diversity: In India women unite to form regional self-managed crop exchange markets in order to preserve local crop plants for their communities. They have expelled multinational crop corporations' agencies from their region. In Mexico farmers protest against patents on their traditional corn breeds by US companies. In Mali the main farmers' organisation has decided not to allow the growing of genetically modified plants in their country and to protect domestic crop plants as the basis for food sovereignty. In Europe there are an increasing number of initiatives for the restoration and further development of old and regional varieties. Farmers claim their ancient right to be able to disseminate, freely exchange, to use and to sell the seeds of the plants they cultivate.

Based on the above, we discussed in Halle our response to proposed abandonment of the primary role of the gene banks.

The conservation of the diversity of crops has to be in the hands of farmers and those who are breeding them voluntarily. This is our answer to the political intention to expand the breeders monopoly privileges of big seed companies and to limit the rights of farmers. The transnational seed industry is attempting to control food production worldwide. With the help of gene technology, patenting of plants and animals, the UPOV convention of 1991, the legal regulations on seeds, and Terminator technology (sterilisation of seeds), they want farmers to become dependant providers of cheap commodities using their seeds. They want to take possession of farmers' and gardeners' knowledge and skills and capture them in agro-industrial structures. We will not let this happen!

Seed is life. We consider seed to be a common good of the people.

We stand for:

- biodiversity to bring back food sovereignty in the world that will help cope with the challenges of climate change;
- the right of farmers to use farm saved seeds, without restrictions or paying licensing fees for farm saved seeds;
- the right to a GMO-free agriculture and food production;
- the right to use regional varieties and landraces;
- the right to sow, exchange, buy, sell, reproduce and distribute all kinds of seeds without legal restrictions;
- the collective right of the communities to protect their local varieties and landraces and to refuse the introduction of seeds that are genetically modified and/or dangerous for the local biodiversity;
- the banning of patents on life.

In taking responsibility for the Earth, for human beings, for nature and for the future generations, we call for:

Diversity for all!

Liberation of our seeds!

On this basis we have taken the following decisions at Halle:

1. the foundation of a European coordination for peasant seeds
2. the immediate foundation of a committee to save the wheat varieties at Gatersleben from GMO contamination
3. advocating a responsible European regulation that guaranties free use and conservation of local varieties, respecting the collective rights of the communities.
4. We are asking the gene bank of Gatersleben to label the harvest of all accessions, if they have grown traditional plants and genetically modified ones of the same species during the same year in the fields of the institute. This concerns, e.g. all varieties of winter and summer wheat (*Triticum*) which have been cultivated in 2007. They should be obliged to indicate it on any sample.