

Biotech Foods: International Safety Laws Agreed

By [Friends of the Earth International](#)

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CURITIBA (BRAZIL), 17 March 2006 – United Nations talks on the global trade in genetically modified (GM) foods and crops ended here today with an agreement on the labelling of GM grains traded worldwide.

Friends of the Earth welcomed the agreement as a “small step forward” but attacked the biotech industry and the trade interests of a few countries for blocking progress towards better protection for developing countries and the environment.

The biotech industry consistently opposed clear identification and labelling requirements for GM crops. Without clear labelling many countries, especially developing countries with their limited resources, are unable to protect their food supply and environment from GM contamination.

Nnimmo Bassey, International Coordinator of the Friends of the Earth GM Campaign said:

“Protection of the environment and the public from genetically modified crops has taken a small step forward today. However it is clear that trade interests and the biotech industry stopped a better agreement from being made. Countries have the right to know what is being imported into their country and the right to say no to GM crops.”

The UN Biosafety Protocol, which was originally agreed in January 2000, provides basic international rules that allow mainly developing countries to regulate the safety of GM foods, crops and seeds. It has been ratified by 132 countries but the three main countries that grow GM crops – the United States, Argentina and Canada – have refused to support it.

Ten years after the first significant planting of GM crops, no plants with benefits to consumers or the environment have materialized and GM crops have failed to deliver the promises of the biotech industry. More than 80% of the area cultivated with biotech crops is still concentrated in only three countries: the US, Argentina and Canada.

Friends of the Earth International recently published a report that concluded:

- * GM crops are not green. Monsanto’s GM soybeans, the most extensively grown GM crop today, has led to an increase in herbicide use. The intensive cultivation of soybeans in South America is fostering deforestation, and has been associated with a decline in soil fertility and soil erosion.

- * GM crops do not tackle hunger or poverty. Most GM crops commercialized so far are destined for animal feed, not for food, and none have been introduced to address hunger

and poverty issues. In Argentina, the second biggest producer of GM crops in the world, only 2% of the soya stays in the country. Other developing countries, such as Indonesia and India, have experienced substantial problems with Monsanto's GM crops, often leaving farmers heavily indebted.

* The biotech industry has failed to introduce the promised new generation' of GM crops with consumer benefits. After 30 years of research, only two modifications have made it to the marketplace on any scale: insect resistance and herbicide tolerance.

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For more information: Background on biosafety: <http://www.foei.org/gmo/biosafety.html>

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