
Organizations from Brazil, Latin America and other continents delivered a letter to the Brazilian National Biosafety Commission

Press Release For immediate release.

On the 4th of September 2014, 260 organizations from Brazil, Latin America and other continents delivered a letter to the Brazilian National Biosafety Commission (CTNBio) expressing their deep concern about the application by the company FuturaGene, owned by Suzano, to plant and commercialize transgenic eucalyptus. The organizations urge the Commission to reject FuturaGen's application.

Brasilia, September 4 2014. Today in Brasilia, members of the Movement of Rural Landless Workers (MST), Movement of Small Peasants, La Via Campesina and Terra de Direitos presented two letters in which 260 groups from more than 40 countries urge the CNTBio to reject the application by the company Suzano Papel e Celulose, through its subsidiary FuturaGene, to commercially release transgenic trees. (1)

The letters were delivered during the public audience specifically organized by CTNBio to address the request by Suzano/Futuragene (2). Suzano/Futuragene's interest is to increase, by using transgenic trees, the productivity of their industrial tree plantations. The company argues that their new genetically engineered (GE) tree will result in a 20% increase in productivity and by doing so will increase "competitiveness and environmental and socio-economic gains through higher productivity using less land and therefore overall lower chemical inputs and lowered carbon release, as well as making land available for food production or conservation and enhancing the income of outgrowers."

However, social movements and organizations state in their letters that "Industrial tree plantation companies have long promised that gains in productivity would lead to less land use. In Brazil, for example, where the productivity of monoculture tree plantations per hectare increased from 27 m³/ha/year in the 1980s to 44 m³/ha/year currently, the area covered by plantations has increased from about 4 million hectares at the end of the 1980s to more than 7.2 million hectares today. Historically, there is thus no evidence that in Brazil, increases in productivity led to less land being occupied by industrial tree plantations."

João Pedro Stédile from the MST notes that "*the plantation of millions of hectares of industrial tree monocultures in Brazil and their continuous expansion for producing pulp for export is one of the main obstacles that prevent the struggle for agrarian reform from advancing in the country.*"

Marciano Silva from the MPA adds, "*it is of utmost importance to stress that the technology being discussed at CTNBio (the reduction of the content of lignin on the trees) is very dangerous because of gene flow, which will carry the pollen to crops that produce wood, and can cause problems such as death of bees, damaging the natural pollination and consequently agricultural production with biological (environmental) and economic losses*".

In relation to the use of agrottoxins, the letters note that "The argument used by the GE technology

lobby that the introduction of GE crops — such as soy and maize — results in less use of pesticides and fertilizers has already been proven to be false. There is no plausible reason to expect that the use of “chemical inputs”, including agrotoxins, will decrease as a result of planting GE trees. On the contrary, it will increase with the increasing occupation of land which is planned to take place and the intensification of growing cycles and the ensuing nutrient depletion of soil and land.”

Ivonete Gonçalves, coordinator of the NGO CEPEDDES from Bahia, said that *“regretfully Brazil is already the number one consumer at the global level of agrotoxins, resulting in hundreds if not thousands of victims a year, increasing pressure on the already insufficient public health services. Expanding the model of monoculture eucalyptus plantations with transgenic trees means aggravating the soil and water contamination and increasing the number of peasant communities expelled from their lands.”*

According to the national legislation in Brazil, the National Biosafety Council must carry out an analysis of the socio-economic impacts derived from the possible commercial release of transgenic trees before any final decision is reached. Referring to this requirement, André Dallagnol, lawyer from the NGO Terra de Direitos stated that *“a serious analysis, based on the precautionary principle and one that takes into account the environmental and socioeconomic impacts, would immediately show that the release of transgenic trees would further damage the Brazilian people, especially in the countryside, that are already affected by the agribusiness model.”*

“The threat posed by the release of transgenic trees in Brazil, and another similar release process occurring simultaneously in the United States, is a wake-up call not only for those living on the American continent but for the people of many countries in the world where large companies apply this model of production based on large-scale tree monocultures. The industry will be the beneficiary from this new and dangerous technology, while communities - who already suffer from the negative impacts of monoculture tree plantations - will once again suffer most of the social, ecological and economic consequences. This new option by the industry to “play” with nature without an assessment of the mid- and long term impacts of this technology on native trees and forests and the local economies that depend on those forests will increase the suffering these large-scale monocultures are already causing”, says Teresa Perez from the World Rainforest Movement.

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Notes:

1- The letters delivered are available at :

– Open letter to the Brazilian National Technical Biosafety Commission (CTNBio)

<http://wrm.org.uy/all-campaigns/open-letter-to-be-sent-to-the-brazilian-national-technical-biosafety-commission-ctnbio/>

– Statement in Support of the “Open Letter to CTNBio” (solamente em inglês)

<http://wrm.org.uy/pt/acoes-e-campanhas/statement-in-support-of-the-open-letter-to-ctnbio/>

2- Edict of the public audience available at

<http://www.ctnbio.gov.br/index.php/content/view/4581.html>