Press Release

36 Organic Mega-Countries – Global Organic Agriculture Crop Area Reaches 26 Million Hectares

Organic Sector Calls for Strict Liability Under the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety

Bonn, May 30th 2005 – Organic farming, the systematic conversion of land to certified practices that ensure food safety and security from the farm to the table, a comprehensive and fully traceable system, is developing rapidly throughout the world. According to the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movement's study *The World of Organic Agriculture: Statistics and Emerging Trends 2005*, 36 countries achieved organic mega-country status in 2004, meaning that over 50,000 hectares of certified organic land are currently being cultivated. In total, over 26 million hectares of land are currently certified worldwide, generating over $25 billion in revenue in 2003.

558,449 farms in 108 countries are currently certified, and many millions of people are involved in the production, marketing, processing and distribution of organic products, generating immense income for a great number of people while simultaneously enhancing biodiversity and protecting the environment for future generations.

Organic agriculture is a holistic system that promotes and enhances biodiversity, biological cycles, and soil biological activity. Certified organic products are those which have been produced, stored, processed, handled and marketed in accordance with precise technical specifications (standards) and certified as organic by a certification body. The use of GMOs within organic systems is not permitted during any stage of organic food production, processing or handling.

The International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-Biotech Applications (ISAAA) issues an annual report on the amount of global biotech crop acreage. The 2005 report indicates that there were 14 biotech mega-countries in 2004 – countries where more than 50,000 hectares or biotech crops are being grown. The figures, however, are dubious. For instance, whereas the report claims that 500,000 biotech hectares are being grown in South Africa, a report from Agricultural Biotechnology in Europe, an industry coalition, and a survey team from the University of Reading in the UK show that the ISAAA's figures are exaggerated by factors of 20 and 30 respectively, and a recent report from GRAIN (www.grain.org) demonstrates that out of 3,000 farmers who originally grew Bt cotton there, only 700 continue to do, and many farmers who chose to grow the cotton are now perilously in debt. Also, 98% of the world's GM crops are still grown in only four nations - USA, Canada, Argentina and a bit in China, which has remained the same for the last five years.

Biotech crops grown in so-called biotech mega-countries are planted indiscriminately without any substantive regulatory framework, increasing reliance upon dangerous herbicides and pesticides, creating super-weeds and destroying biodiversity in order to increase yields in the short term, but ultimately rendering the cropland useless, while simultaneously contaminating the world's major food crops with undesirable characteristics. This contamination is not something the biotech industry should flaunt, but rather, the biotech industry should be held strictly liable for all such contamination under the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. Biotech crops have been riddled by scandal, from StarLink corn, which was not approved for human consumption but nevertheless entered the food supply, prompting the recall of over 300 contaminated food products from shelves

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in the USA and continues to linger in the food supply, to the illegal entry of a 1000 tons of Bt10 into the European Union, also not approved for human consumption, and the recent publication of internal Monsanto documents, reviewed by EU scientists, revealing serious health damage to laboratory animals fed Monsanto's new genetically engineered "rootworm-resistant" corn. Rats who consumed the mutant corn developed smaller kidneys and exhibited blood abnormalities.

Biotech crops containing industrial enzymes, pharmaceuticals, viruses, antibiotic resistance markers and other traits have been planted in large-scale field tests for years in the USA, but tests for those experimental crops do not exist, and thus it is likely that contamination of agricultural crops is much more widespread.

Alternatively, organic agriculture ensures food security and safety for future generations, distributing income equitably among those involved in the chain of production, and credibly backing up its claims with thorough documentation. Organic agriculture also increases or stabilizes yields in developing countries, particularly in marginal and semi-arid areas, increasing productivity without dependency on unaffordable chemicals. The IFOAM Basic Standards include social standards that ensure the protection of workers' rights. IFOAM Accredited certifiers (www.ioas.org) adhere to these social standards, and IFOAM is working together with the International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labelling (ISEAL) Alliance (www.isealalliance.org/) to improve the effectiveness and compatibility of social and environmental standards and verification systems.

IFOAM calls for strict liability to be imposed for the introduction of GMOs. To insure that the costs of injuries resulting from defective products are borne by the manufacturer that put such products on the market rather than by the injured persons who are powerless to protect themselves, strict liability for GMOs is warranted. Strict liability ensures that organic farmers and consumer receive protection from problems of proof inherent in pursuing negligence, placing the burden of loss on manufacturers rather than injured parties who are powerless to protect themselves. IFOAM applauds the inclusion of a GMO liability regime in the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, an idea that originated from African nations and other Third World nations, and is opposed by the USA and Canada.

IFOAM's Position on Genetic Engineering:
www.ifoam.org/press/positions/ge-position.html

To purchase a copy of ***The World of Organic Agriculture: Statistics and Emerging Trends 2005***, go to the IFOAM website www.ifoam.org. Additional information can be requested from the IFOAM Head Office (Charles-de-Gaulle-Str. 5, 53113 Bonn, Germany, phone +49-228-92650-10).

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