

## Faith in Rats

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While the scientists the Committee for Independent Research and Information on Genetic Engineering (CRIIGEN, by its initials in French) alert the world about the tumors, hepatorenal damage, premature aging, reproductive system disorders and anomalies recorded in rats fed transgenic maize (Silvia Ribeiro, *La Jornada*, 6/10/12), Monsanto is rushing to make good on its deal with President Felipe Calderon, to green-light the planting of transgenic maize in Mexico before the end of his term.

Last September, Monsanto solicited the first two permits for commercial planting of 700,000 hectares of maize in Sinaloa. A few weeks later, Pioneer Hi-Bred International asked for three permits for commercial planting of 320,000 hectares in Tamaulipas. The types of transgenic maize they seek to sow include Monsanto's MON 603 maize, the star of the experiments led by Dr. Seralini, of France's CRIIGEN.

Around 300,000 hectares of irrigated corn are usually planted in Sinaloa, but Monsanto requested 700,000 hectares for this autumn-winter crop cycle. This indicates that Monsanto intends to sow GM maize on all the existing irrigated hectares in Sinaloa, starting this December, in the municipalities of Ahome, Angostura, Culiacán, El Fuerte, Elota, Guasave, Mocolito, Navolato, Salvador Alvarado, Sinaloa de Leyva.

In Tamaulipas, Pioneer aims to double the acres planted with corn, using transgenic seeds in the municipalities of Camargo, Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, Matamoros, Miguel Alemán, Reynosa, Río Bravo and Valle Hermoso.

The Sinaloa and Tamaulipas farmers who produce maize for the market use hybrid seeds, which they buy each year from multinational companies like Monsanto, Pioneer, and Dow. These are the same companies that produce and promote genetically modified seeds. If these companies decide to market only GM seeds, the farmers will have no other options. In addition, those farmers who choose not to plant transgenic crops will be inevitably contaminated by their neighbors, and their corn will be mixed in transportation, silos, grain elevators and warehouses. As in the United States, it will be impossible to segregate GM from conventional maize, and the whole crop will end up contaminated.

Sinaloa is the largest producer of corn in the country. The crop is harvested in June and July and yields about 5 million tons that are distributed to all the major cities in the country for human consumption. If the permits for Monsanto are approved, the inhabitants of Mexico City, Monterrey and Tijuana, for example, will be consuming transgenic tortillas by the middle of next year. Of course, the tortillas will not have any warning labels that indicate that eating transgenic tortillas can cause cancer, sterility, immune diseases, nor will they include the photograph of rats with tumors the size of

ping-pong balls. The city dwellers will have no choice to consume healthy, GMO-free tortillas and corn products.

Since corn from Sinaloa reaches almost every corner of the country, the threat extends to rural areas, where GM corn will pollute locally adapted varieties, dispersing transgenes among the landraces.

Each person consumes an average of 115 kg of maize per year in Mexico. Corn provides about half the calories and a third of the necessary proteins. It is the fundamental basis of the entire population.

The permit requests from Monsanto and Pioneer are now under public consultation. But this consultation is a fiction, because the argument for employing the precautionary principle is not taken into account in the permit process. Given the authorities' lack of responsibility and the absence of a biosafety law that actually protects the interests of the population, civil society must be actively involved in stopping the commercial planting of GM maize in Mexico.

The rats in the experiment of Dr. Seralini attest to the health damages caused by GMOs. In Mexico, based on new scientific findings and in accordance with the precautionary principle, the only sensible action would be for the state to reinstate the moratorium on experimental and commercial planting of GM maize, before people feel the negative effects and Monsanto and other corporations are forced to issue an erratum accepting that their transgenic foods are harmful to human health.

Translated by Alice Brooks.