

## Breeders' Exemption on patent does not stop monopolization of food

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Gerda Verburg (Dutch minister of Agriculture) and Maria van der Hoeven (minister of Economic Affairs) last week announced their preparation of a bill that would include a restricted breeders exemption to the national law on patents (Rijksoctrooiwet 1995). Plantum NL, representing the Dutch seed branche, responded with optimism to the announcement. According to A SEED Europe the proposed limited exemption on patenting of living organisms is very far from sufficient. It does not counteract an unwanted concentration of power in the agricultural and food sector.

Large agrochemical firms like Monsanto use patents to get control over the total chain of foodproduction, from seed to tomato to steak. A SEED is part of the international coalition 'No Patents on Seeds' that warns against this tendency.

### Monsanto claims Meat

Multinational seed corporations are following a consequent strategy to gain control over basic resources for food production. As recent research shows not only genetically engineered plants, but more and more the conventional breeding of plants gets into the focus of patent monopolies: International patent applications in this sector are skyrocketing, having doubled since 2007 till end of 2009. Further on the multinationals expand their claims over the whole chain of food production from feed to animals and food products such as meat. In a pending patent application from Monsanto even bacon and steaks are claimed: Patent application WO2009097403 is claiming meat stemming from pigs being fed with the patented genetically engineered plants of Monsanto. A similar patent is applied for fish from aquaculture in March 2010 (WO201027788). Far reaching patents on food are even already granted: Monsanto received a European patent (EP 1356033) in 2009, which the chain of food production from seeds of genetically engineered plants up to food products such as meal and oil are covered.

"There is a process going on, multinationals are trying to gain increasing control of the whole chain of food production. Consumers, farmers and food producers are all caught by the same trap. This has to be regarded as an immoral attempt to abuse patent law. The company is heading for maximising its profits by filing patents on food while at the same time one billion people is suffering from hunger," says François Meienberg from the Berne Declaration.

As experience from the US shows, patents on seeds and increasing market concentration are leading to drastic increase in seed prices, reduced choice in seeds and soaring dependencies for farmers. Meanwhile the Department of Justice and state attorneys general in several US states are investigating whether Monsanto Company has abused its market power to lock out competitors and raise prices in seeds.

The coalition of 'No Patents on Seeds is warning that market concentration will even increase if the abuse of patent law is not stopped. The coalition is supported globally by more than 200 organisations including A SEED Europe. The organisations are demanding a clear change in policy and practise of patent offices. Governments are urged to to revise the patent laws in order to exclude patents on seeds, animals and parts thereof.

### Brochure: You Reap what You Sow - on monopolisation of seeds

A SEED has published a brochure on Monsanto's activities in the Netherlands and its position in the sector. Additionally A SEED organizes actions, information meetings and discussions to draw attention to this issue.