

2006 ACTIVITY REPORT

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1. Introduction

The Network was established in November 2003 when eight European Regions joined an initiative set up by Tuscany and Upper Austria. The Network aimed to share information and best practice on the subject of coexistence, as well as providing an outlet for local and regional administrations to assert their desire for GMO-free status.

Many Regions already recognised that quality, sustainable agriculture, based on local circumstances and production methods must be protected from risks of uncontrolled GM contamination. Regions were attracted to the Network because it offered an EU wide forum to promote their own sustainable agriculture policies and co-operate with other administrations to insist that local, organic and traditional producers should not be prevented from competing in a globalized market.

2003 was the year of great changes in European GMO policy, with several new regulations and a recommendation on the subject of coexistence between GM crops and conventional and organic farming. But 2003 was also the year of the European CAP reform that has introduced important changes for our farmers and territories.

2006 was the marker line between two structural fund programme periods (2000-2006 and 2007-2013) and our Regional governments have been approaching the opportunities provided by new programmes with the knowledge and experiences obtained from the past ones.

Against this background, 2006 was also an important year for our Network. The Vienna conference proved to EU institutions that we were a serious organisation with a valuable and unique perspective on the GM debate.

Reflecting on our achievements, it is clear that 3 years of successful joint working has raised the profile of regional concerns with all the EU institutions and demonstrated the link between GM free, local agriculture and sustainable rural development.

2006 (and last part of 2005) has also been a year of partnership consolidation and a period of dialogue with other organisations (AER, COPA-COGECA, European Commission services, COEXNET initiative, International Commission for the Future of Food and Agriculture, Committee of Regions, European Parliament and several others). This work may not have attracted mass media attention but it built an important foundation for furthering our aims.

2006 was also a year of change in the way the Network is run. The establishment of the Steering Committee that frequently met in Brussels has brought more direction and energy to the activities of the Network.

The introduction of an annual report, which is a novelty for the Network, is one of the initiatives of the Steering Committee. It has been developed to give every member of the Network (and external observers) an overview of the main events of 2006 and an insight into new challenges, goals and activities planned for 2007.

The new demands of the Steering Committee and the ambitious programme for 2007 have also necessitated a review of the organization of the Network and are fuelling consideration of more formal membership, funding and participation arrangements.

2. 2006 main appointments

i. 14-15 Jan 2006 – Berlin Conference of anti-GMOs movements

Some Network's Regions participated to this Conference. The Network was directly invited by organizers. Tuscany and Upper Austria gave speeches to inform about the ongoing initiatives and the background story of the Network. Bretagne introduced their activity with Brazilian partners. The occasion was very good to meet a high number of representatives from different places all over Europe. Unfortunately there wasn't a large participation of Institutional representatives.

Outcomes of the Conference can be found at:

<http://www.gmo-free-regions.org/conference-2006.html>.

ii. 23 February 2006 – Meeting with COPA-COGECA

The meeting, hosted by COPA-COGECA, was requested by the Network to have an exchange of view on themes on which the Network issued a position (coexistence, contamination threshold in seeds and organic farming, research). COPA-COGECA was represented by Franz-Josef FEITER (Secretary General) and Roxanne FELLER (Head of Unit).

Main result: possible alliance on strategic themes (coexistence and liability). No agreement possible about contamination/labelling threshold.

iii. 23 February 2006 – Meeting with DG AGRI

The meeting took place at DG AGRI offices, involving Dr. Leo Maier (Unit Head) and Dr. Andreas Gumbert. Main goal was get info about network approach to coexistence.

Main result: DG AGRI's officers stated that coexistence must be applied even at regional level. No GMO-free zones are possible (only in case of non mandatory local agreements among stakeholders). Against this formal position, DG AGRI demonstrated no clear ideas about technical approaches to coexistence.

Informal invitation to Vienna Conference on coexistence.

iv. 24 February 2006 – General Assembly

A general assembly (only technical level) was called by presidency in order to inform every Network's member Region about the ongoing initiatives and to gather ideas.

Main result: Share and give information, exchange of views, discussion about the way forward.

v. 4-6 April 2006 – Vienna Conference on Coexistence

The Conference set up by European Commission was a sort of global European debate on the coexistence. The title "freedom of choice" gave the idea of the general perspective (freedom for everybody – pro and anti GMOs). The Network had the possibility to show its view on the subject. In the occasion the Network constitute a partnership with AER. Under the lead of Brittany a leaflet on all the existing positions of the Network was produced, printed and published to have a useful tools fro presentation of the entire Network. Organizers reserved to the Network several seats to attend the meeting. Outcomes of the event can be found at:

http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/events/vienna2006/index_en.htm .

Main result: Publicize Network's view. Consolidate the role in front of European Institutions.

vi. 16 June 2006 – COEXNET meeting

The DG AGRI invited a representative of the Network to attend the 16 June meeting of COEXNET. Prof. Brunori participated on behalf of the Network, giving a speech and reporting after the meeting. The occasion was good to consolidate Network's visibility on European scene.

It's possible to see the proceedings of COEXNET meeting at the following address:

<http://forum.europa.eu.int/Public/irc/agri/home/main> (it's necessary to sign up and follow the procedure, than it's possible to download documents from CIRCA domain – group COEXNET link).

Main result: Give information (economic impact of GMOs on local farming practices) and collect information (working system of COEXNET and participants).

vii. 6 July 2006 – Meeting with European Commission DG ENV

Meeting of working group 2 (directive 2001/18/) and discussion with 2 representatives from DG ENV (Biotech and GMO unit) about possible amendments of the directive, ongoing initiatives, status-quo of GM-authorisation procedures, exchange of views.

Main result: Get information, receive suggestions.

viii. September 2006 onward – CoR opinion on coexistence by Lazio' s President (P. Marrazzo)

In September started a teamwork (Lazio – Network) to set up a text suitable for the aims of our network and to strengthened the draft opinion during the vote in the DEVE Commission. Network proposed several amendments to President Marrazzo, some of them were introduced in the final draft text, some amendments have been suggested by Upper Austria, voting in COM DEVE beginning of October, final voting with a huge majority in favour of the opinion in December during the CoR plenary session in Brussels.

Main result: The opinion was almost unanimously adopted in December by CoR plenary assembly.

ix. November 2006 onward – EP draft report on biotechnology (Virrankoski report)

A draft report very pro-GMOs appeared on November in the EP Agriculture committee agenda. This draft was analysed by the Network and several amendments were proposed to some MEPs (mainly from PSE and PPE). These amendments were discussed during the Agri Com meeting in January 2007. Some of them have been introduced in the approved text.

Main result: Consolidate the position of the Network in front of MEPs. Modify a very bad (and sad) draft report.

x. 14-15 December 2006 – Meeting between Network and International Commission on Future of Food and Agriculture

This event was inserted in the programme of the Tuscany Region's Conference of Agriculture (an event that take place in Tuscany more or less once a 7 years). The Network had the occasion to directly approach the International Commission on GMOs issue. During the meeting a draft joint statement has been drafted. The statement could be signed during the next Conference of the Network.

Main result: Enlarge the potential partnership to not institutional group of experts.

xi. Other

Beside the above enlisted main events, the Network carried out several other activities.

A particular mention can be given to the review of a draft study on biotech (pro-GMO) presented at European Parliament in September (on which the Network signalled some misleading sentences) and to the works carried on by some working groups on themes like research, controls, international relationship and EU legislation).

GMO-FREE REGIONS EUROPE NETWORK

3. 2006 activities complete quick summary

Date	Object	Further info
January 14-15	Berlin Conference	participation of Tuscany, Oberösterreich and Bretagne as speakers on behalf of GMO-free Network (http://www.gmo-free-regions.org/conference-2006.html)
February 23	Working Group 2 meeting (ENAE)	set up meeting with DG ENV
February 23	Steering Committee meeting	set up meeting with DG AGRI and COPA-COGECA
February 23	Steering Committee meeting with COPA-COGECA	presentation of the position of the Network regarding coexistence - exchange of point of view with Franz-Josef FEITER (Secretary General) and Roxane FELLER (Head of Unit)
February 23	Steering Committee meeting with Leo MAIER , Head of Unit "GMO and Environment" of DG AGRI	presentation of the document on coexistence and state of the art in view of Vienna Conference
February 24	Steering Committee meeting	set up Vienna Conference; discussion about proposal for Net's organization; approval of the Net's leaflets; planning 2006 activities
February 24	General Assembly	information and general debate
April 4-6	Vienna Conference on Coexistence	participation of several GMO-Free Network's partners in the Conference and speeches from Tuscany Region Agriculture Minister on behalf of the Network and the ARE. (http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/events/vienna2006/index_en.htm)
April 27	Steering Committee meeting	large debate after Vienna Conference; discussion about Net's organization and network's name; possible partnership with ARE.
June 16	COEXNET meeting	participation of an expert on behalf of the Network
July 5-6	Steering Committee meeting	discussion about Net's organization and network's name; overview of possible net's initiatives; update on COR opinion about coexistence drafted by Lazio Region's President; outcomes of COEXNET meeting.
August-September	Consultation on Net's name	
September-December	COR opinion on coexistence	teamwork by network to produce amendments supported by Oberösterreich and Niederösterreich in COR DEVE commission
October	Presentation of a draft study on biotech to the EP	teamwork by network to analyse and produce a critique of the study before its presentation to the AGRI Commission of the EP
October 24	Steering Committee meeting	discussion about the next Net's Conference (who? where? when?); planning working Groups activity; results of consultation on the name of the Net; next network's engagements and possible initiatives; first approach to new organic regulation (GMO threshold).
November 6-7	Italian National Workshop on Coexistence organized by Tuscany Region	presence of several representatives from GMO-free Network
November 24	Working Group 4 meeting (Lazio)	definition of possible engagements on research activities
November 28	Working Group 7 meeting (Euskadi)	launching meeting of WG on Controls
November 28	Working Group 5 meeting (Bretagne)	GMO-free soy feeding stuff initiative launching meeting
November - December	European Parliament Report on biotechnologies	teamwork by network to produce amendments on a very pro-GMOs draft report from Virrankoski (a finnish MEP). Network's amendments were adopted by several MEPs of PPE and PSE.
December 14-15	Tuscany Regional Conference on Agriculture	meeting between GMO-free Network's representatives and International Commission on Future of Food and Agriculture (http://www.arsia.toscana.it/cibo/homee.htm).

4. 2007 main challenges and objectives

The calendar of events and engagements for the forthcoming year is filling up quickly. In addition to activities started in 2006, that will conclude this year, like the Conference on feeding stuff (October) and some meetings with third parties (IFOAM, EU Commission services), 2007 will see important highlights such as the organization of the 5th Conference of the Network (17-18 May in Turin – Piemonte (IT)) and a meeting with MEPs (July).

Main objectives

2007 main objectives include the enlargement of the Network's membership and the reinforcement of collaboration with the European Parliament and other European Institutions with regard to an acceleration of the debate on contamination thresholds in seeds and a possible review of the European legislative framework.

Main Challenges

The main challenges in pursuit of these goals will centre on the effective participation of the network in the ongoing debate, and encouraging a contribution to the work of the Network from every member Region (not always easy). Other challenges will include reaching a consensus on how to improve the network's organization and working arrangements.

From a political point of view, a big challenge could be holding an internal Network debate on future CAP reform, starting from a regional perspective and exploring the scope for added value in local and regional agri-food production.

The Network could be used as a platform to lobby EU Institutions not only on the GMO issue but also on a wider range of related matters (including/starting from GMOs).

Another challenge facing the network is the opportunity to obtain resources and increase knowledge under the 7th Framework Programme for research activity. The Network could try to create partnership on a particular subject and participate in a project proposal.

Lazio Region (leader of Working Group 4 – research) is trying to define a list of possible projects to be presented during the 7FP.