Cal GE-Free Newsletter – Nov. 2007

Take Action: Oppose UC Berkeley Deal with BP

On February 1, 2007, BP Amoco PLC (formerly British Petroleum) announced that it had chosen the University of California at Berkeley to host the Energy Biosciences Institute (EBI). Funded with $500 million over 10 years, the agreement would double the amount of corporate funding for research on campus, and change the direction of biofuels research on this campus for years to come. The details of the agreement are currently in negotiation. This deal has not been signed.

A Berkeley-based student campaign formed to oppose this deal. They insist that UC Berkeley must commit itself to responsible, accountable research in the interest of social justice and sustainability.

To sign the petition, go to:
http://www.thepetitionsite.com/1/international-petition-on-bps-500m-project-to-genetically-engineer-biofuels

There are three major reasons to oppose the BP-Berkeley agreement:

- **The undemocratic process by which it is being struck**. So far, this deal has been made "at the top", with most of the UC Berkeley community unaware it was taking place, and no opportunity for concerns or criticisms. A project of this scale will change the course of research on campus, and is explicitly against the recommendations given to UC Berkeley in the wake of the Novartis deal.
- **The social and environmental consequences of this research**. Biofuel research could be a great force for good. It could also directly promote social inequality and environmental degradation. The research agenda needs to explicitly consider the dimensions of social justice and ecological sustainability, which the current proposal does not.
- **BP's control over the research agenda**. In the BP-Berkeley proposal, BP will have at least as much power over the direction of the EBI as will Berkeley itself, and up to 50 BP employees working on campus will be allowed to participate in developing and teaching classes, mentoring graduate students, and K-12 outreach. Corporate research focuses on questions that promise patents and other opportunities for profit, and neglects research areas that benefit only the public.

More information about the campaign can be found at http://stopbp-berkeley.org.

France suspends planting of GMO crops

http://in.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idINIndia-30164820071025

On October 25th, French President Nicolas Sarkozy said he would suspend the planting of genetically modified (GMO) pest-resistant crops until the results of an appraisal of the issue later this year or early in 2008.

Unveiling the country's new environment policy, Sarkozy said no GMO crops would be planted in France until the government had received the results of an evaluation by a new authority on GMOs set to be launched later this year.

"I don't want to be in contradiction with EU laws, but I have to make a choice. In line of the precautionary principle, I wish that the commercial cultivation of genetically modified pesticide GMOs be suspended," he said.

Percy and Louise Schmeiser Win Right Livelihood Award
http://www.rightlivelihood.org/2007_10_02.html

The 2007 Right Livelihood Award, often referred to as the "Alternative Nobel Prizes," is being shared between four recipients, including Canadian farmers Percy and Louise Schmeiser. According to the press release, the Schmeisers "have given the world a wake-up call about the dangers to farmers and biodiversity everywhere from the growing dominance and market aggression of companies engaged in the genetic engineering of crops. The Jury honours the Schmeisers for their courage in defending biodiversity and farmers' rights, and challenging the environmental and moral perversity of current interpretations of patent laws."

The Right Livelihood Award Foundation is a Swedish charitable foundation that has so far presented Awards to 123 Recipients from 56 countries. The Awards were founded in 1980 "to honour and support those offering practical and exemplary answers to the most urgent challenges facing us today".

Greenpeace Finds GE Contamination in Budweiser Beer

Greenpeace released the results of analyses showing the presence of an experimental genetically engineered (GE) strain of rice at an Anheuser-Busch operated mill in Arkansas that is used to brew Budweiser. An independent laboratory test, commissioned by Greenpeace, detected the presence of GE rice (Bayer LL601) in three out of four samples taken at the mill.

Bayer LL601 rice was the source of the 2006 contamination of at least 30 percent of rice stocks in the United States. The GE contamination had a massive negative economic impact on the U.S. rice industry as many countries subsequently stopped or significantly restricted the import of U.S. rice.

"Anheuser-Busch must make a clear statement about the level of GE contamination of the rice used to brew Budweiser in the U.S. and spell out what measures are in place to ensure this beer does not reach the company's export markets," said Doreen Stabinsky, Greenpeace agriculture campaigner.

For the complete press release, visit: http://usaphoto.greenpeace.org/gebud/

Correction
In the September newsletter, in our story on the expected 2008 commercial availability of a GE sugar beet resistant to Roundup herbicide, we reported that no sugar beet is produced in California. In fact, a small amount is grown here, primarily in Imperial, Fresno, Kern, Merced, and Kings Counties. The total acreage in 2005 was 44,000 acres, representing an approximate market value of $65,000. It ranks as California's 48th crop in value, and the acreage has been steadily declining in the past 10 years.

In addition to potential human health impacts associated with consuming GE sugar from sugar beets, there are environmental and agronomic issues involved. Sugar beets readily cross with wild beets, and Roundup Ready sugar beets could confer herbicide tolerance to this weed, making it more difficult to

control. Also, as Roundup resistance in various other weed species is on the rise, introducing another Roundup Ready crop will cause the usage of Roundup to further escalate in areas where there is already an over-reliance on this herbicide and resulting emerging superweed issues. Finally, when a GE sugar beet was approved for commercialization in the 1990's, market rejection was so significant that Monsanto decided to defer their marketing plans. If this next GE sugar beet is produced, it will be at risk of renewed market rejection and economic harm for farmers.