

RED POR UNA AMERICA LATINA LIBRE DE TRANSGENICOS



DECLARATION ON THE INTRODUCTION OF TRANSGENIC POTATOES IN BOLIVIA

La Paz, May 2000

We, the undersigning organizations, are making the following DECLARATION in relation to the freedom solicited by the PROINPA Foundation and Leeds University to introduce the transgenic potato with resistance to nematodes in Bolivia:

CONSIDERING THAT:

Bolivia is the center of origin of the potato. The genetic diversity of the potato is so high, that within an ayullu (a familiar farming unit) up to 70 varieties can be found, from sour and semi-sour to sweet. Recent studies have demonstrated that 235 species of potatoes exist, between wild and cultivated.

The potato is a basic component in assuring the food sovereignty of Bolivian farming families and of the country. The potato is the most important basic food in the country.

In Bolivia there exists a high risk of genetic contamination by lateral transfer of the introduced genes, from the transgenic potato to these traditional varieties. This would produce serious impacts in biodiversity, including: genetic erosion, disappearance of some varieties by genetic derivation, and the disappearance of traditional cultural practices connected to the potato.

Genetic contamination can be produced by natural methods of cross-pollination, and also by already existing cultural practices in the country, like the exchange of seeds between farmers, which has been an important practice to maintain and increase the great genetic variability of this crop.

The presence of wild relatives in the entire Bolivian Andean region is very high. The contamination of the wild relatives by the transgenic potatoes could generate the appearance of weeds, impossible to control, which would be endowed with characteristics of resistance acquired in the process of genetic transformation.

The introduced characteristic, which confers resistance to nematodes, could affect other ground-dwelling micro invertebrates. Many of these micro-invertebrates play a fundamental role in the nutrient cycle, in the health of the ground: they serve as food for larger organisms like frogs, birds, etc. The disappearance of these micro-invertebrates could generate a cascading ecological impact, affecting the whole trofic chain

During the tests there is the risk of the appearance of nematodes which are resistant to the toxin introduced in the potato, which will be converted into "super plagues," impossible to control.

The studies being done in England are still not finalized. However, they want to initiate tests in Bolivia, where, as both Urwin and Lilley from Leeds University have recognized, the risks are greater.



The Agreement on Biological Diversity has recognized the principle of precaution in relation to the use of biotechnology. In the text of the Protocol of Biosafety (or Protocol of Cartagena), adopted in January of this year, the precautionary principle is recognized as the directing element of biosafety. This means that we cannot risk the principal resource that a country like Bolivia has, which is their biodiversity, to favour a technology about which exist more doubts than certainties.

WITH THESE ANTECEDENTS, WE DEMAND:

That a moratorium should be called on all the field tests and new realises into the environment of transgenic crops in Bolivia, particularly of those crops which have wild relatives or traditional varieties in the country.

That other alternatives are searched for, based on the great genetic richness of Bolivia to resolve the problems that we are today trying to solve with modern biotechnology. With the existing genetic richness of the potato in Bolivia it does not make sense that techniques like genetic engineering are utilized, when the potentialities of existing varieties in the country have not even been studied.

The advantage of doing studies with our own varieties and utilizing traditional methods is that we will have, as results, varieties that will be able to be used and control easily by peasants.

In the minutes of the meeting of the Advisory Committee on Realises into the Environment (ACRE) from May 7, 1998, which analyzed an application done by Leeds University, in the United Kingdom, the Committee emphasized that these potatoes could not enter the food chain of the British community. The risks to human and animal health of the presence of proteasa inhibitors and of indications of the resistance to antibiotics are too great, and only small scale evaluations are allowed. The application done by PROIMPA who collaborated with Leeds University in this project, says that the material resulting from the transformation will be donated to the poor farmers in Bolivia, which will make it inevitable that they enter into the Bolivian food chain and environment. Furthermore, this case is put as "Developing a paradigm for safe adoption of GM crops with a poverty focus: a specific example of nematode resistance for potato in Bolivia"

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