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Open letter to the institutions of New Caledonia to begin GMO labeling

Dear Elected Representatives,

Through this open letter, we wish to call on the institutions of New Caledonia to start legislative actions for the Genetically Modified Organisms policy.

By reading the timeline below, one will appreciate the significant steps that have been made during 2013 and 2014 in this field.

It is clear, however, that since February 2014, the regulation has not evolved. As of today, there is no form of GMO labeling, no ban of GMOs for animal feed and above all no strong policy position of New Caledonia to prohibit this type of technology (or give the consumer the opportunity to choose consume or not transgenic products).

We wish to bring to your attention two key elements:

- A growing number of countries all over the world (over 60 to date) have regulations on the labeling of GMOs in human food. This labeling is required in France and throughout Europe since the 27th of January, 1997, as well as in Australia and New Zealand since 2001. Therefore, the issue of the origins of GMO food products is not an obstacle to the establishment of a regulation.
- A ban on transgenic crops in New Caledonia would assert the will of the territory to move towards quality agricultural channels to meet growing demand from Caledonian consumers for healthy local products and GMO-free products, (island territory GM / non-GM coexistence is impossible), and a better agricultural self-sufficiency and food sovereignty.

Facing the continued delay in the adoption of a such regulation, we are asking for:

- the adoption of a text on mandatory labeling of GMOs for human consumption in 2016
- the implementation of the regulatory text on GMOs which was developed as part of the work of the Consultative Committee of the Environment, which was already approved in 2013, dedicated exclusively to this issue (including agricultural GMOs animal feed and human food, including catering).

STOP OGM Pacifique, supported by these signatories, is available to help the Government, the Congress and the Provinces for the concrete implementation of this regulation.

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Timeline

October 2012:

The Advisory Committee for the Environment of New Caledonia makes a vow concerning the implementation of regulations on GMOs, including:

1. GMO seed ban on use in agriculture and field experiments
2. the obligation to feed industries including aquaculture using non-GM raw materials
3. the mandatory labeling for foods containing GMOs ingredients
4. the establishment of a system of controls and penalties for breach of the regulations.

October 2013:

Following this opinion, a working group composed of members of the local institutions, research institutes and representatives of civil society helped to draft a regulatory text adapted to the territory, which was approved unanimously by the Committee in October 2014.

In February 2014, the Government:

- incorporated a decree (2014-333 / GNC on conditions for importing products posing sanitary risks) of provisions to prohibit the importation of GM seeds for fruits and cereals.
- voted a draft decision on the labeling of food products that included the labeling of products containing GMOs.

This draft decision submitted to Congress before the provincial elections in 2014 was not discussed by Congress and is no longer an item in the list of texts to study and vote.

December 2014:

STOP OGM Pacifique handed over a petition to the President of the Government and the President of Congress for labeling of GMOs in New Caledonia that would help avoid, among other things, the importation of Australian GM wheat. The association collected over 12 000 signatures during this campaign: if our demands were heard, any concrete decision was taken by the institutions as a response.

Since February 2014: No further progress on this issue.

Regarding the products based on glyphosate, including the “Roundup” (trademark of Monsanto company, world leader in genetically modified crops and seeds):

March 2015: The World Health Organization classified Glyphosate as a probable human carcinogen (Group 2A) among other chemical pesticides. STOP OGM Pacifique launches a petition to ban these kinds of products in New Caledonia, and asks that glyphosate to be banned for non-professional use.

November 2015: The glyphosate petition has collected more than 8 000 signatures. It was presented to the President of Congress. Despite our repeated requests, members of the government (Chairman and member in charge of agriculture, Vice-President and member of the Government in charge of health) have refused to receive us for an official handing in of our petition.