

'No' to GM Crops  
**Brett Cherry**

*[Friends of the Earth exposes misleading statistics presented by industry-linked group to promote GM crops.]*

The acceptance of GM crops exaggerated, says a report released by environmental group *Friends of the Earth International (FoE)* in February 2009, which criticises the industry-funded International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications (ISAAA) for inflating statistics on GM crops grown in the world.

According to its annual brief, the ISAAA highlights the fact that 25 countries in the world are growing GM crops; but they make up only 2.4% of global agricultural land, FoE points out. The ISAAA claims a 21% increase of GM crops grown in the EU for 2008; but FoE reveals an actual 2% decrease between 2007 and 2008, and a 35% decrease in GM crops grown in the EU over the past 4 years.

The ISAAA brief did not include Romania and France in its figures for 2005-2007, making it appear that a significant rise in GM crops had occurred in Europe, especially in 2008. But since Romania became an EU member state in 2007, it no longer grows GM crops, accounting for most of the 35% decrease of GM crops in the EU. This decrease also includes France, which banned GM maize MON810 in 2008.

Romania and France joined Austria, Poland, Greece and Hungary in banning MON810. But despite the national ban, Poland continues to grow MON810. It is the only GM crop allowed to be grown commercially in the EU. GM crops in the EU make up only 0.21% of its total agricultural land.

The FoE report also exposes other manipulation of global statistics for GM crops. The ISAAA claims total of "166 million trait hectares" of GM crops in the world since 2008. This figure was contrived by multiplying the surface area by the number of traits in GM crops. For example, one field of GM crops that has three genetically engineered traits becomes three "trait fields" thereby tripling its figures for "trait hectares".

This is not the first time the ISAAA has presented false and misleading statistics to promote GM crops.

The ISAAA brief promises greater yields by planting GM seeds. Yet there has not been a single case of increased yield with commercial GM crops. As FoE remarks, even the USDA has admitted to no increase in yield potential for any commercial GM crop in use today. In many cases, GM crops have been found to yield less.

Another supposed benefit of GM crops, according to the ISAAA, is in helping a large proportion of small farmers in developing countries. The ISAAA claims the total number of biotech farmers increased by 1.3 million, totalling 13.3 million farmers who use GM crops of which 12.3 million are "small and resource-poor farmers in developing countries." FoE report refers to the UN International Fund for Agricultural Development estimate of 450 million small and medium-sized farmers worldwide. Assuming ISAAA estimate is correct, only 2.7% of small farmers in the world grow GM crops.

The ISAAA further claims that GM crops would result in less pesticide use. Instead, GM crops promote the spread of large amounts of herbicides like glyphosate based *Roundup*, which is now found to be highly toxic for human and animal cells. FoE reports that since GM crops have been introduced in the US, there has been a 15-fold increase in glyphosate use on soybeans, corn and cotton from 1994-2005.

FoE says the best method for addressing global issues of poverty and malnutrition is through agro-ecological and low cost traditional farming techniques, organic agriculture, not GM technology, is the most sustainable solution to feeding the world. -TWNF □□□