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Farmers and Seed Industry Appeal National Biotech Corn Ban

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Planting Seeds

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Report Highlights:

On March 29, French corn growers and seed organizations appealed France's national ban on MON810 biotech corn before the country's highest administrative court on the grounds that it was scientifically unjustified and economically harmful for farmers. Despite the fact that the State Council lifted the ban last November, per the conclusions of the European Court of Justice, France reinitiated its national ban on the cultivation of MON810 biotech corn on March 18, 2012. The press revealed that the Government of France reinitiated the ban without the advice of the High Council on Biotechnology. The Council's dysfunction was recently highlighted by the recent resignation of several of its members in the socio-economic subcommittee.

General Information:

On March 29, French maize growers and seed companies appealed France's national ban on MON810 biotech corn before the country's highest administrative court, the State Council (in French, "Conseil d'Etat"), on the grounds that it was unjustified and economically harmful for farmers. See press release at:

<http://www.agpm.com/pages/communique000124c4.php>.

In a joint statement, French corn growers group AGPM, French seed firms association UFS and the maize and sorghum producers federation FNPSMS stated that "this restriction does not rely on any serious scientific element." They hope that the State Council will overturn the government's ban, based on their positive experience with the commercial cultivation of MON810 until 2008. This product is the only biotech event commercially grown in the European Union, and France's national ban on it prevents French farmers access to the technology, which is widely used in Spain, Portugal, Czech Republic and Slovakia.

Despite the fact that the State Council lifted the ban on November 28, 2011, imposed since 2008, per September 2011 conclusions of the European Court of Justice, France reinitiated its national ban on the cultivation of MON810 biotech corn on March 18, 2012. A [decree](#) banning MON810 corn cultivation was published in France's [March 18, 2012 Official Journal](#), as a "precautionary measure to protect the environment."

For a full translation of the decree in English, [click here](#). The decree was signed by Minister of Agriculture Bruno Lemaire, who is also the main drafter of Sarkozy's presidential program. Note: Presidential elections will take place on April 22 and May 6, 2012).

Interestingly, the press revealed that the Government of France reinitiated the ban without the advice of the High Council on Biotechnology (HCB), which is France's official advisory committee on biotech products. In a letter to the Prime Minister, the president of HCB states that the Council was not required advice from the French competent authorities to suspend the cultivation of MON810 corn seeds.

Whatever the results of the coming presidential elections in France, it is likely that the format of biotech assessment authority will have to be changed. Currently, the HCB is the only national biotech authority in Europe including both a scientific and a socio-economic subcommittees. HCB's socio-economic committee is facing dysfunction and several of its members have recently resigned, including representatives of the leading French farmers union (FNSEA), of the food industry (ANIA) and of the union CFDT.