

The Biotech and Pesticides lobby in Brussels



Do the tour:

visit the murky world of corporate lobbyists in the EU quarter pushing genetically modified food and pesticides

Monsanto, Syngenta, BASF, Bayer, Dupont/Pioneer and Dow aim to control the food production system, each trying to get an ever bigger share of the market for (biotech) seeds and pesticides. With big budgets, they heavily influence EU politics through their Brussels lobby offices, via trade associations, and via hired-gun lobbyists from PR companies. These are the corporations that want us to believe that genetically modified (GM) food will feed starving populations, and that pesticides are safe to eat.

These companies all have lobby offices in or close to the powerhouse that is Brussels' EU quarter where their targets are located (see Box). Their lobby activities are often organised and coordinated through lobby associations representing different sectors: EuropaBio (biotech companies), the European Crop Protection Association (ECPA – pesticide industry), CropLife ("plant

science", i.e. genetically modified organisms and pesticide producers), European Seeds Association (ESA – seeds companies), International Life Sciences Institute (ILSI), and BusinessEurope (an umbrella lobby organisation for big business).

Tactics include PR stunts, fancy conferences for policy makers, greenwash and using the 'revolving doors' method for recruiting key staff. EU rules facilitate the corporate agenda: the 'safety testing' of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and pesticides is largely done by industry themselves. And the agency responsible, the European Food Safety Agency (EFSA), has been criticised because its experts and directors have been shown to have conflicts of interest.

The biotech and pesticides lobby's main targets

► DG Health & Consumers (SANCO)

Rue Froissart 101



Responsible for the authorisation of GM crops for import and cultivation, and for the use and 'safety' of pesticides. Commissioner John Dalli's first and very controversial act as Commissioner was to approve a GM crop for cultivation in the EU, the first crop to be approved in 12 years. The BASF Amflora potato contains an antibiotic-resistant gene.

► DG Research

Square de Meeus 8



The EU's prime goal is competitiveness for European industry – the Lisbon agenda. In food and farming, this translates as high-tech intensive farming with products protected by intellectual property rights such as patents. DG Research has a massive research budget (€53.2 billion for 2007-2013) to promote the Lisbon goals. And industry loves to get subsidies, i.e. public money. The Commission grants industry a direct say in how this budget is spent through 36 industry-led "high technology platforms". They advise on the "Strategic Research Agendas" and then apply for the money. Biotech-related platforms include "Plants for the Future" and the "European Biofuels Technology Platform" which has given money for research into GM trees for agrofuels.

► European Parliament

Rue Wiertz



With its influential Environment Committee, the European Parliament is another major lobbying target. Various cases have been found of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) tabling amendments written by industry lobbyists. MEPs also can have an unlimited number of second jobs including being a lobbyist. For example the former MEP John Purvis' extensive financial interests included being a partner in a firm that invests in the biotechnology sector. At the same time Purvis was the leading Conservative MEP promoting pro-biotech in the European Parliament. Some MEPs, including Liberal Britta Reimers and Conservative Mairead McGuinness, have done the biotech industry big favours, distorting progressive debates on food issues by introducing pro-GMO arguments. Reimers also hosted the 'farmers' GM food tasting event in June 2010 (see Edelman/The Centre).



► European Feed Manufacturers' Federation (FEFAC)

223 Rue de la Loi

Declared lobbying budget: >€250,000 (2010)



FEFAC – the animal feed lobby representing corporations like Cargill – has been one of the lobby organisations fighting to break down a key piece of EU GMO legislation: the 'zero-tolerance policy' which does not allow the food and feed supply to be contaminated by unauthorised GMOs – which are illegal. FEFAC, along with EuropaBio, scaremongered EU politicians, saying that this policy harmed the competitiveness of Europe's intensive pig and poultry farming. They even claimed that as a result of this policy, feed prices would soar and millions of animals would starve. They of course grossly overstated the case, as analysis of official EU data by Friends of the Earth Europe proved. FEFAC's lobby campaign has also been supported by food lobby group CIAA (Confederation of the food and drink industries of the EU which includes Unilever, Kraft and Nestlé) and FEDIOL, the organization that represents the European oil seed crushers and processor. Cargill, ADM and Bunge are members of FEDIOL.

► EuropaBio

6 Avenue de l'Armée

Declared lobbying budget: >€400,000 (2010)



EuropaBio is the umbrella lobby group for a number of biotech-related industries fighting to increase their profits. It argues for fast GM crop approval in the EU, claiming that GM crops are safe, that they will feed the world and help combat climate change. They fight for less regulation (see also FEFAC), and for more public funding for biotech research. EuropaBio and the European Seed Association (ESA) are fierce advocates of EU-funded platforms such as Plants for the Future to get public money in the pockets of their members.

EuropaBio uses PR firms, for example to make MEPs believe there is a 'pro-GM' farmers movement. In June 2010, PR company Edelman/The Centre organised a

► European Seed Association (ESA)

23 Rue du Luxembourg

Declared lobbying budget: >€600,000 (2009)



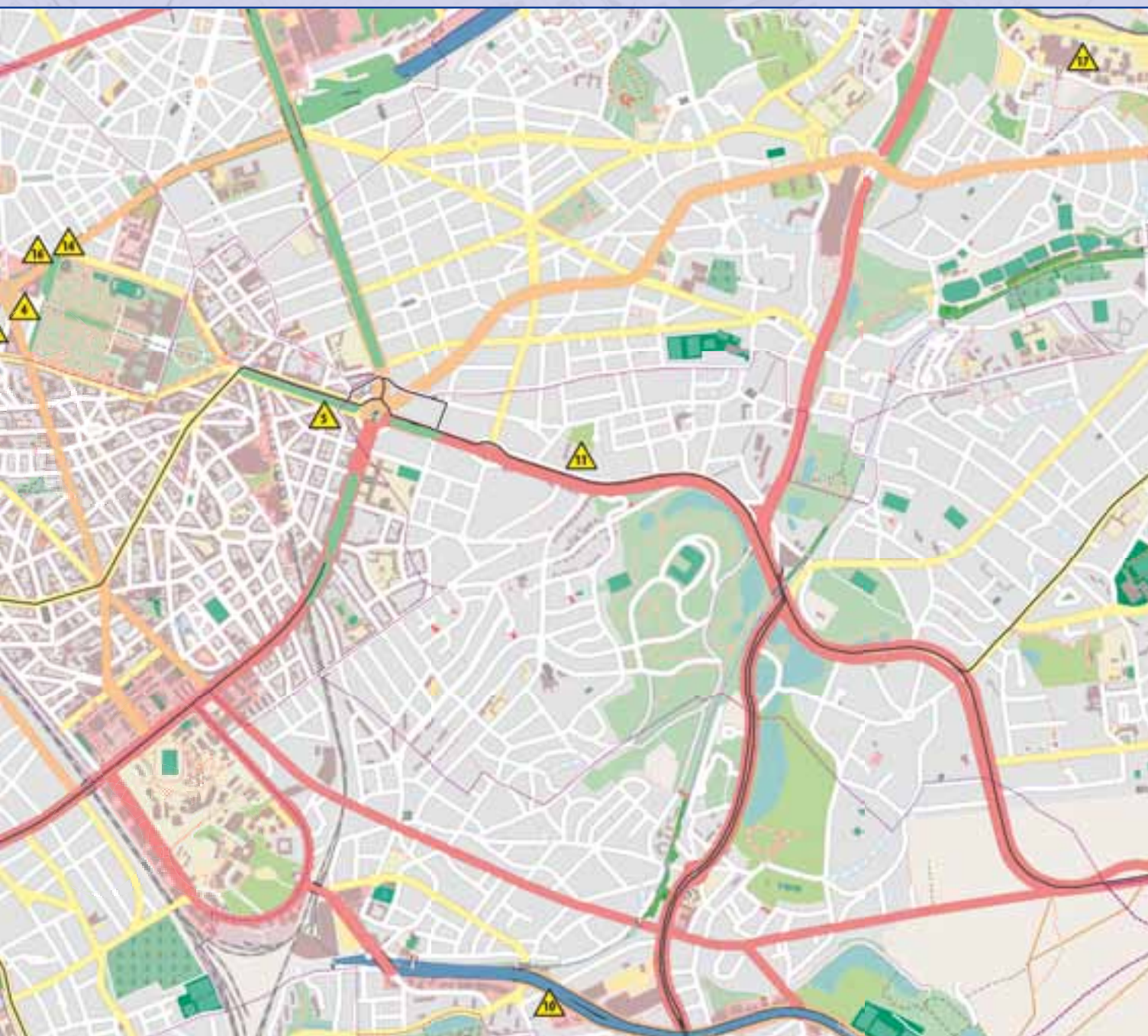
'GM food tasting' event with polenta made from GM maize, in a posh hotel near the European Parliament. The event was supposedly organised by the so-called "Farmers Biotech Network", but it was paid for by EuropaBio, a 'regular client' of Edelman/The Centre. The farmers 'network' appeared to consist of only 18 farmers. The Centre used to be a think tank but recently merged with PR company Edelman (in their own words "the world's largest independent public relations firm, with 3,200 employees in 52 offices worldwide"). Think tanks in Brussels are mostly industry-funded and so follow industry's agenda. Edelman/The Centre also has Monsanto and Syngenta as clients.

► Edelman/The Centre

22 Avenue Marnix

Declared turnover: €3,507,951 (2009)





► **Blueprint Partners**

58 Avenue des Arts

Declared turnover: >€1,000,000 (2009)

► **Dupont**

44 Avenue des Arts

Lobbying budget: >€150,000 (2010)

► **European Crop Protection Association (ECPA)**

6 Avenue Edmont Van Nieuwenhuyse

Declared spending <€50,000 (2010)

The European Crop Protection Association (ECPA) has hired PR firm Blueprint Partners at an estimated cost of €150,000 per year, according to the Commission's lobby register. However, ECPA itself only declared spending €50,000 on lobbying annually. ECPA was particularly active lobbying on the new pesticides package accepted by the EU in 2009. They opposed the "cut-off criteria" that could have excluded certain pesticides from being authorised. ECPA strongly opposes actions by member states to "arbitrarily reduce [pesticide] use". They claim: "there is no systematic link between how much you use, and the risk involved". Blueprint Partners developed "Pest Planet" a propaganda comic strip explaining that the new EU pesticides legislation would mean a green light for bugs to eat up crops, hurting productivity. The comic was made "to challenge policy makers' perceptions" and was circulated in the EU quarter.

► **Monsanto**

270 Avenue de Tervuren

Declared lobbying budget: >€300,000 (2010)

Monsanto's lobbying activities in Brussels are in line with its reputation: hidden, secretive and dirty. The Monsanto building, just outside the EU quarter, used to have a giant company logo on the façade. Now not even the smallest name placard indicates that Monsanto is still there – apart from perhaps a signpost to the 'Monsanto Park' nextdoor. Nevertheless, lobbying work is being done. Monsanto pushes silently to get approval for the most infamous GM crops – herbicide-tolerant RoundupReady soy and maize – to be grown in the EU. In March 2010, Monsanto organised a closed and unpublicised two-day conference for industry and policy makers in an expensive Brussels hotel on the alleged benefits of RoundupReady maize. Romania is the EU member state most vocally in favour of RoundupReady soy cultivation. Romania's agriculture minister, Valeriu Tabara, is an ex-Monsanto employee. In addition to its own staff of lobbyists, Monsanto hired PR firm Edelman/The Centre in 2009 and law firm Hume Brophy in 2010 for amounts up to €350,000 and €100,000 respectively.

► The European Food Information Council (EUFIC)

6 Rue Paul-Emile Janson

Lobbying budget: undisclosed

12

EUFIC is a food-industry-funded think tank providing the public and journalists with often one-sided information on the safety of foodstuff and on issues such as food labelling. Its board members are top-level EU lobbyists for agribusiness. Half of them are, or were, active within the powerful lobby group the CIAA. In 2010, EUFIC's public relations expertise on risk management was taken up, through a 'reverse revolving door' case, by EFSA, the European Union's food safety agency. After five years as EUFIC's communication manager, Laura Smillie was hired by EFSA without any cooling-off period and her PR strategy to limit the media impact of food crises due for instance to novel GM foods has been included in EFSA's official guidelines.

► Syngenta

240 Avenue Louise

Declared lobbying budget: >€600,000 (2009)

13

Swiss company Syngenta is one of the world's leading producers of GM crops. In 2008 the firm appointed Suzy Renckens, a leading staff member of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), as its chief lobbyist for the EU. At EFSA, Renckens was scientific coordinator of the GMO panel. She is now Syngenta's Head of Biotech Regulatory Affairs for Europe, Africa and the Middle East. She can use her network and detailed knowledge of how EFSA works to lobby the EU institutions for her new industry bosses. The fact that EFSA did not consider that this revolving door case could cause a conflict of interests reveals a lot about its proximity to industry.

Greenwash

The biotech and pesticide industry have no problem pulling off costly high profile networking events in Brussels featuring Commissioners as speakers. Syngenta in 2011 organised a high profile "Forum for the Future of Agriculture" with key speakers Commissioners Dacian Cioloş (Agriculture) and Janez Potočnik (Environment). Similarly, Croplife along with comrades in crime EuropaBio and ECPA organised a "Biodiversity World Tour" event in Brussels' Town Hall in September 2010 with an opening speech by Commissioner Potočnik. Monsanto, Syngenta, Cargill and BASF are all member of the Round Table on Responsible Soy, a controversial voluntary labeling scheme set up by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). With this scheme, they will be able to sell GM RoundupReady soy as "responsible" in Europe. However, deforestation and pesticide use can continue almost unchanged with this label.

► BASF

60 Avenue de Cortenberg

Declared lobbying budget: €1,300,000 (2009)

14

In March 2010 the European Commission gave the green light for cultivation of BASF's genetically modified potato Amflora in the EU. It was the first time in 12 years that a new GM crop was approved – a decision that was the result of a long and aggressive lobbying battle by BASF. In 2008 the company launched a large advertising campaign in major German newspapers, publishing an open letter to then Commissioner for Environment Stavros Dimas entitled: "Amflora is a safe and environment-friendly product that offers benefits to farmers and industry in Europe".

BASF also filed a complaint in the European Court of First Instance in Luxembourg against the Commission on the potato case, for "failure to act". They threatened the European Commission and the German government that it would move its research activities if the potato was not authorised before the end of February 2010. Commissioner Dalli gave in and officially gave the green light on 2 March 2010.

► Bayer

40 Square de Meeûs

Declared lobbying budget: €1,850,000 (2010)

15

► Dow

52 Avenue de Cortenberg, 3rd floor

Declared lobbying budget: >€600,000 (2008)

16

Corporations have the resources to jump into any 'gap in expertise' the EU institutions may think they have. The European Commission itself facilitates corporate involvement in 'expertise' by outsourcing advisory work to 'expert bodies' on which industry has seats. In this way, staff from Bayer, Dow, BASF and Syngenta were able to sit in working groups giving 'expertise' on the impacts of pesticides on bees. This is a major issue, since mass bee 'die-offs' have been occurring in Europe. Bees fulfil a key role in biodiversity and food production. These working groups advised the Commission on the review of guidelines on how to assess the impacts on bees. As the producers of the very pesticides thought to be harmful for bees, these 'experts' downplayed the impacts. According to the European Beekeeping Association, following their proposals would have disastrous consequences for bees.

► ILSI Europe

83 Avenue Emmanuel Mounier

Lobbying budget: undisclosed

17

ILSI Europe is the European branch of the controversial Washington-based industry-funded think tank and lobbying organisation International Life Sciences Institute. In 2006, the UN agency banned ILSI from taking part in activities of the World Health Organisation (WHO) related to setting standards for food and water. ILSI already had a track record of putting the interests of its corporate members ahead of science and health concerns. ILSI Europe's research has been used to weaken the European food safety agency's (EFSA) evaluation process for GM crops. Last year, Diána Bánáti, the chair of EFSA's management board was forced to resign from the ILSI Europe's board as it was damaging her credibility. A prominent member of the EFSA GMO panel, Harry Kuiper, also worked for an ILSI 'task force' which, according to ILSI and Monsanto, successfully influenced EFSA's guidelines for the risk assessment of new GM plants.



CEO

Corporate Europe Observatory

Rue d'Édimbourg 26, 1050 Brussels. www.corporateeurope.org ceo@corporateeurope.org