



PRESS RELEASE

Portuguese farmers call for more innovative agricultural technologies to remain competitive, environmentally-friendly

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Portuguese farmers have grown nearly 60% more genetically modified (GM) maize this year compared to last year, an increase of almost 3,000 ha to a total of 7,843 ha in 2011. This impressive growth highlights the need for more innovative agricultural technologies in the European Union (EU). Compared to North and South America, Asia, and, increasingly, Africa, the EU has approved far fewer GM products, which directly affects farmers' competitiveness.

During a study tour to Portugal, farmers expressed their need for the latest agricultural innovations. Currently, there are only two GM crops approved for cultivation in the EU, an insect-resistant maize that helps to decrease European corn borer damage, as well as a potato for industrial uses.

Spanish figures, too, have increased this year, reaching nearly 100,000 hectares of GM maize. It is estimated that Spanish farmers had an income gain of €65 million (1996-2009) thanks to the cultivation of insect-resistant GM maize. A [study by the Joint Research Centre](#)¹ showed that this maize increased farm income by up to €122 per hectare, led to higher average yields of 11.8% in an area of heavy insect pressure, and resulted in a reduction in insecticide costs by as much as €20.04 per hectare.

João Grilo, a Portuguese farmer based in Vale do Mondego, Coimbra commented, "I have planted GM maize since 2006, and I adopted it because I saw results- healthier plants due to less insect damage, a better harvest and better grain quality. For me, it is very important for more GM

Benefits of GM crops

- Higher productivity: growing more on less land
- Better income for farmers: global farm income benefit of over €7 billion in 2009
- 53% of farm income gain in 2009 to farmers in developing countries: they gained €1 billion more when planting GM crops.
- Less need to till the soil saves fuel and money, and reduces carbon emissions – removing the equivalent of nearly 8 million cars' CO₂ emissions from the road in 2009.
- Farmers save money through reduced applications of crop protection products.
- Two-thirds of the benefits of growing GM are shared among farmers and consumers, while one-third goes to the developers and seed suppliers.
- Higher yields help to preserve natural habitats.
- GM crops can help save water.

¹ Joint Research Centre of the European Commission (2008). "[Adoption and performance of the first GM crop introduced in EU agriculture: Bt maize in Spain.](#)" Also published in *Nature Biotechnology*, April 2008.

crops to be made available to European farmers. I have been in contact with farmers in other countries who produce other GM crops, and they have higher yields. We import some of their GM crops to Europe, yet we are not allowed to grow them in our own fields. We are all competing for the same market but with different rules. Having access to more GM crops would improve the long-term sustainability of Portuguese and European agriculture. But once again Europe and Portugal are trailing far behind the rest of the world."

Pedro Fevereiro, investigator and professor of Plant Cell Biotechnology and President of Centre for Biotechnology Information (CiB Portugal), explained "The following agricultural years will witness important climatic changes, which will be followed by abiotic and biotic stresses, to be withstood by the different crops, especially in the Mediterranean area. Genetically modified cultivars are one of the already available technologies to cope with the difficulties to be faced. Productivity needs to be increased, and this technology is already proven to enable cultivars to attain their maximum potential, protecting the plants and the environment against pests, diseases and weeds, while creating products that are safe and healthy. These benefits are being experienced and accumulated all over the world for more than fifteen years. It is time for the European farmers to profit from this technology."

Carel du Marchie Sarvaas, EuropaBio's Director for Green Biotechnology Europe, commented, "EU farmers are missing out on €440-930 million each year, simply because they do not have access to the GM crops that could be grown here. There are other foregone benefits for the environment, too, such as no-till methods, fuel savings, carbon emissions reductions and less spraying. There is no question that these crops are already benefiting farmers and the environment elsewhere – otherwise, why would over 15 million farmers around the world continue to plant them?"

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Additional Resources

[GM crops: global socio-economic and environmental impacts 1996-2009](#). (Brookes and Barfoot, 2011)

[The Impact of the EU regulatory constraint of transgenic crops on farm income](#). (Park et al, 2011)

[Global impact of biotech crops: socio-economic and environmental effects 1996-2008](#). (Brookes, G., Barfoot, P., 2010)

[No easy fix: Simply using more of everything to produce more food will not work](#). *The Economist* Special Report on Feeding the World, February 2011.

[ISAAA 2010 Global Status of Commercialised GM crops](#), February 2011

[EuropaBio GM Benefits Factsheet](#), December 2010

[EuropaBio Pocket Guide to GM crops and Policies](#), May 2011

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About EuropaBio

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