

no patents on seeds

Monsanto bio-piracy supported by European Patent Office

Patent granted on screening biodiversity in soybean plants for climate adaption

26 February 2014, Munich. Today the European Patent Office in Munich (EPO) is granting a patent to Monsanto on screening and selecting soybean plants adapted to certain climate zones (EP2134870). The plants supposedly have higher yields in different environmental conditions. The soybeans concerned are wild and cultivated species from Asia and Australia. According to the patent, more than 250 plants from “exotic” species were screened for biodiversity in climate adaption and variations in maturity. Monsanto has claimed hundreds of DNA sequences representing natural genetic variations for future use in the conventional breeding of soybeans. The patent also applies to other regions such as the US, Canada, China and South Africa, although the EPO seems to have been the first to grant this scandalous patent.

“This is nothing other than large-scale bio-piracy. Monsanto is trying to control access to genetic information needed to develop soybeans adapted to climate change”, says Christoph Then for the international coalition *No Patents on Seeds*. “Interpreted correctly, European patent law does not allow the EPO to grant patents on conventional breeding. What we now need is a strong response from European governments to stop these patents.”

In May 2012, a resolution was adopted by the European Parliament, which “calls on the EPO to exclude from patenting products derived from conventional breeding and all conventional breeding methods.” However, this resolution has so far been widely ignored by the EPO. A political decision to stop these patents could be taken by the Administrative Council of the EPO, which is made up of representatives of the European governments. The German government has already announced a European initiative. In January 2014, the French Senate asked the government of France to become actively involved.

The organisations behind the coalition of No Patents on Seeds! are extremely concerned that such patents will foster further market concentration, making farmers and other stakeholders of the food supply chain even more dependent on just a few big international companies and ultimately reduce consumer choice. The coalition of No Patents on Seeds! is organised by Bionext (Netherlands), The Berne Declaration (Switzerland), GeneWatch (UK), Greenpeace, Misereor (Germany), Development Fund (Norway), No Patents on Life (Germany), Red de Semillas (Spain), Rete Semi Rurali (Italy), Reseau Semences Paysannes (France) and Swissaid (Switzerland). They are calling for a revision of European Patent Law to exclude breeding material, plants and animals and food derived thereof from patentability. The coalition is supported by several hundred other organisations.

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