

no patents on seeds



Media Release

“Patent industry selling out future of our food”

New report published about patents on seeds and call for a public protest

23 October 2014 The international coalition of *No Patents on Seeds!* today published a report on patents on seeds. The report was prompted by the fact that the European Patent Office (EPO) has already granted several thousand patents on plants and seeds, with a steadily increasing number of patents on plants and seeds derived from conventional breeding. Around 2400 patents on plants and 1400 patents on animals have been granted in Europe since the 1980s. More than 7500 patent applications for plants and around 5000 patents for animals are pending. Amongst others, the EPO has already granted more than 120 patents on conventional breeding and about 1000 such patent applications are pending. The scope of many of the patents is extremely broad and very often covers the whole food chain from production to consumption.

Amongst the patents granted recently, are 'inventions' such as peppers bred from wild varieties originating from Jamaica, tomatoes that were developed through sourcing the international gene bank in Germany, sunflowers from random mutagenesis and a selection of wild relatives of soybeans found in Asia and Australia.

“Industry together with the EPO are the driving factors turning the patent system into an instrument for misappropriation of basic resources needed to produce our daily food. They are selling out future of our food”, warns Christoph Then, one of the authors of the report. “By restricting access to genetic resources, EPO patent practice is severely hampering innovation and breeding. Furthermore, it is endangering agrobiodiversity and adaptability in food production systems needed to react to the challenges of climate change. As a consequence, we are putting our global food security as well as regional food sovereignty at risk.”

According to European patent law, plant and animal varieties as well as processes for breeding plants and animals cannot be patented. Nevertheless, decision-making at the EPO has, in fact, intentionally created a situation full of legal absurdities that allows prohibitions to be circumvented, and serves the interests of multinationals such as Monsanto, Dupont and Syngenta, who already control around 50 percent of the international commercial seed market. Apart from the EPO, patent attorneys are amongst those that benefit financially from an increasing number of patents. In 2013, the EPO made a profit of 1.5 Billion € from patent and procedural fees.

The new report has been published just a few days ahead of a crucial hearing at the EPO on 27 October. Many observers expect the EPO to make a landmark decision on these cases within the next few months. However, as the report shows, it is highly unlikely that the EPO will stop patents on plants and animals, no matter how currently pending cases are decided. For this reason, the international coalition of *No Patents on Seeds!*, together with many other organisations, calls for a public demonstration outside the EPO on the day of the hearing, where it will demand that European governments take action to stop patents on plants and animals. Included in the coalition of *No Patents on Seeds!* are 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). *No Patents on Seeds!* is 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.

Contacts: Christoph Then, Tel 0049 151 54638040, info@no-patents-on-seeds.org

Report: www.no-patents-on-seeds.org/en/information/background/european-patents-on-plants-and-animals