

Soon All Soybean Will Be Transgenic in Brazil

Contributed by Eduardo Mamcasz
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Nearly half the 58 million tons of soybeans that Brazil expects in its next harvest are transgenic. This phenomenon, which is no longer just a subject of debate, but a significant aspect of the new Brazilian agricultural landscape, was the focus of a special radio program.

The broadcast called "Soybeans - A Big Business," was presented on Friday, January 20, by Brazil's state-owned Radio Nacional and is available in its entirety to listeners on the Agência Brasil's website.

According to the director of Research and Production of the Brazilian Seed and Transplant Association (ABRASEM), Ivo Carraro, there will be even more growth of transgenic soybean cultivation in the coming years, because "the technology really makes the farmer's life a lot easier."

He pointed out that in some regions, such as Rio Grande do Sul, the upcoming soybean harvest will be almost 100% transgenic. Bahia and Mato Grosso, he says, are not far behind.

For João Flávio Veloso, deputy head of research and development at the Embrapa (Brazilian Agricultural Research Company) Soybean Unit, the expansion of transgenic soybean cultivation in Brazil is "only a question of markets" from now on.

That is why the federal government's agricultural research enterprise is working to obtain approval for various species discovered by members of its research staff.

Approval of these species, the sale of which would give Embrapa a source of royalty revenues, is up to the new National Technical Commission on Biosecurity (CTNBio), which is in the process of setting up its council of representatives.

In the opinion of the head of the Foreign Trade Department of the National Agricultural Federation (CNA), Antonio Donizeti Beraldo, the CTNBio needs to be more agile in authorizing the use of new transgenic soybean species.

According to Beraldo, this would end the dominance of the multinational company, Monsanto, which controls the rights to Roundup Ready, the world's most widely used brand. Donizeti considers it essential "to democratize farmers' access to other varieties."

Another problem created by the massive introduction of transgenic soybeans is the huge quantity of smuggled seeds that continue to be used illegally. For the acting minister of Environment, Cláudio Langone, this has entailed "very serious consequences" for the country.

ABRASEM director Ivo Carraro believes that the level of contraband transgenic soybean seeds in Brazil "is nearly making it impossible to continue doing research."

Environmental activists, who have always been opposed to the use of transgenic soybeans, are trying to adjust to the new reality, even while they persist in their belief that, in time, farmers will go back to planting conventional soybeans.

This point of view is reflected in the thinking of the coordinator of Greenpeace's genetic engineering campaign, Ventura Barbeiro. At the moment he is focusing his attention on issues related to consumer protection and enforcement of the Label Law, which applies to every product containing more than one percent of substances of transgenic origin.

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