

Brazil Approves Release of Monsanto's Transgenic Corn Under Protests

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Brazil's National Biosafety Technical Committee (CTNBio) approved this Thursday, August 16, the commercial release of the transgenic corn Guardian, which has been developed by the multinational company Monsanto. The product, resistant to insects, is the second kind of genetically modified corn to be authorized for commercialization by the CTNBio.

Activists from the peasant organization Via Campesina protested against the measure during the meeting to approve the new seed, which took place in the Science and Technology Ministry building in Brazilian capital Brasília. They held signs saying among other things: "Don't contaminate Biodiversity," and "CNTBio does harm to Brazil."

The final result was 15 votes in favor of the approval against one against it. The only vote contrary to the measure was the one from the Environment Ministry representative, Rubens Nodari.

This is the fourth release of genetically modified seeds, for planting in Brazil. In May, the same commission had approved Bayer's corn Libertlink.

A preliminary order from Paraná state's Federal Justice had determined that CTNBio should not consider any request of commercial release for GMOs (genetically modified organisms) before devising monitoring rules. The CNTBio presented these rules just a few hours before the voting process.

Monsanto Company welcomed the CTNBio's result. The approved product is known in the United States as YieldGard Corn Borer.

The regulatory process in Brazil is a multi-step process, and while other steps are still required, the Committee's decision brings the technology closer to reality for Brazilian farmers.

"We're pleased with the decision of CTNBio," said Brett Begemann, Executive Vice President of International Commercial for Monsanto Company. "While more regulatory reviews remain ahead, we can look forward to providing Brazilian farmers with access to the yield benefits of our trait technologies in combination with our higher-yield seed offerings."

Begemann added, "These same technologies have helped other growers increase their productivity and profitability for more than ten years in countries around the world, including Argentina."

CTNBio is managed by the Ministry of Science and Technology and is charged with making science-based, technical assessments of biotechnology crops including commercial conditions of use.

The CTNBio approval may be followed by a review from the National Biosafety Council (CNBS) to examine social and economic factors. Following a favorable review by CNBS, and approvals of the individual MON 810 events in specific hybrid varieties, farmers will be able to plant these higher-yielding seeds.

Corn is the third most planted crop in the world and Brazil ranks third in the world based on harvested area.

Corn hybrids that include the MON 810 event express a naturally occurring protein called *Bacillus thuringiensis*, or Bt, that helps the corn plant protect itself from feeding damage caused by harmful insects, including corn borer.

According to Monsanto, using biotechnology traits to help the plant protect itself from insect damage helps farmers increase yields and reduce the application of pesticides. The MON 810 trait was first introduced in the United States in 1997.