

MAIZE CONTINUES TO BE THE TALK OF THE TOWN

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On 28 September, 2024, during the celebration of National Maize Day, the National Council of Humanities, Sciences and Technologies (Conahcyt) publicly presented the *Scientific Dossier on Genetically Modified Maize and its Effects: The effects of GM maize on human health, the environment and biological diversity, including the biocultural richness of native maize in Mexico* at the Cencalli Museum (or “House of Maize and Food Culture”), in the discussion area of the Los Pinos Cultural Complex.

The study in question is undoubtedly the most thorough and detailed compilation that could have ever been produced and published by an official body such as Conahcyt.

The profusion of studies, data and evidence of “technical and scientific elements, essential to understand the effects of GM maize on human health and the environment,” is surprising. Equally surprising is the number of references to all kinds of publications, webpages and journals, which show the level of detail that is included and considered in the dossier.

The text is, no doubt, a scientific-technical dossier and not easy to read. One would have to spend hours following the trail of all the open threads. It would have been improved if it contained more information about the social and political issues that communities and interested groups are advocating in defence of maize from their regions or at the national level.

For this reason, we will not assess here the technical veracity of the report; that is supported by the references themselves. But it is important to appreciate the political approach that the study uses.

When he saw the dossier, one political commentator in Mexico (who is not close to the government that just ended, nor the new one) said: “This is a manual, a didactic tool, to promote understanding, criticism and activism against transgenic maize and glyphosate and agrochemicals in Mexico.”

What first jumps out is that the original intention of this broad study was to respond to “a request from the Undersecretary of Foreign Trade as part of the collaboration of Conahcyt in the controversy on transgenic maize in the framework of the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), based on Article 63, Section I of the General Law on Humanities, Science, Technology and Innovation, as it is said on page 152 of the dossier.

The policy rationale for the study is made clear in the executive summary. The document points out that since GMOs first began to circulate, there is practically no scientific evidence that they do not have negative effects on human health,

environmental integrity and biological diversity. Furthermore, it points out that the scientific community has insisted “on the potential risks and harm to the future of maize and harm to people”.

Although “there is no scientific consensus on the safety of transgenic crops for human or animal consumption, or environmental release”, there is a body of science that shows that “transgenesis is an imprecise technology with unexpected and undesired effects; in particular, the risks and harms involved have been demonstrated”.

In other words, the document emphasises (and deconstructs with concrete cases) the implications of introducing GM maize into native maize populations and varieties, and the negative consequences this may have “in the environmental, biocultural, social, economic and political spheres”. This has been demonstrated through various scientific investigations, by “scientists free of conflicts of interest”.

Environmental damage has been demonstrated, the report points out, but also damage “in the health of laboratory and farm animals, mainly in the organs of their reproductive and digestive systems; as well as exacerbated immunological and allergic reactions, increased mortality rates and the development of chronic degenerative diseases, with emphasis on the development of cancer.”

Something that should be highlighted, and that not even the USMCA dispute panel seems to want to acknowledge, is that GM maize is inextricably associated with highly dangerous pesticides, which are part of the technological package associated with its cultivation. People and animals that consume food with ingredients based on this GMO are exposed to its pernicious effects, “especially those of glyphosate, which has been shown, even at low doses, to have carcinogenic effects in various ways, to act as an endocrine disruptor and to alter reproductive systems”, in addition to “causing various metabolic diseases and impacts in different organs and systems”.

A little over a year ago, the international organisation GRAIN challenged the U.S. approach, stating: “[For the United States, the 2020 decree was enough to set off alarm bells and to question Mexico's banning](#), even in a phased manner, the import of GM maize and the use of glyphosate. The United States is, after all, the main source of Mexican [maize imports \(and 90% of US maize production is genetically modified\)](#).” As we know, the US agribusiness insists that glyphosate in particular is not harmful.

GRAIN's document also rejected the U.S. position and that of the world's scientific establishment, for its apparent artificial and biased blindness. “The insistence that Mexico has failed to prove the health harms of GMOs is worrisome, given the reams of evidence that Mexico has provided. Even when Mexico convened [a forum on this very subject](#) just last May, with an impressive international contingent in attendance, the US/world scientific lobby remains unimpressed. Corporate techno-science has something like a lock on academia, scientific journals, and the media, making respectful debate impossible. And there are powerful pro-GMO forces in Mexico itself—Mr. Villalobos, for example, who once worked for Monsanto.”

This dossier is clearly a distillation of such vast reams of evidence, summarised in a readable document that meets scientific standards and allow anyone to use this body of evidence to counter the expansionist agenda of the USMCA.

It is therefore strange that after its presentation at Cencalli, when it was made public, the document took a long time to be posted to the Cibogem website. It was uploaded on 25 october 2024 and then removed on 27 October.

Why was this file removed?: It is a document that synthesises all evidence which, according to the US Mexico does not have. Until this is clarified and the document restored, it can be consulted (in Spanish) at biodiversidadla.org.

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<https://ojarasca.jornada.com.mx/2024/11/09/el-maiz-sigue-dando-de-que-hablar-331-1814.html>