

Open letter to French President from French scientists: Lift ban on GMO corn

Several prominent French scientists have written an [open letter](#) urging the French government to comply with last week's decision by the highest French court to [lift the ban on MON810](#), a strain of genetically modified corn, which had been previously authorized by the European Food Safety Authority and the European Union. The letter, which was published earlier this week, came in response to French President Francois Hollande's declaration after the ruling that he would do whatever necessary to prolong the ban.

In response to the ruling, Hollande said, "We cannot accept that a product—corn—have bad consequences on other produce." Because the ban itself violates EU law, the government would have to come to "this decision legally, at a national level and especially at a European level."

Three of the experts who signed the letter—Marcel Kuntz, director of research at CNRS in Grenoble, John Davison, retired director of research at INRA and Agnès Ricroch, a lecturer at AgroParisTech in Paris—are highly respected French scientists who also wrote a recent [article for Nature Biotechnology](#), a study which accuses the French government of using falsified and inaccurate science to prolong such bans on GM crops in order to further their political goals—in an act the scientists termed "biopolitics." They describe several ways in which the French government ignored recommendations from the EFSA, exaggerated safety risks or failed to even consult with biotechnology safety agencies.

In the letter, the scientists called the court's decision "a moral victory to researchers who denounce the misuse of scientific data by the French government." They go on to denounce former President Nicolas Sarkozy's decision last year to prolong the ban, which he instituted in 2008, for political reasons. They then list their requests of the current President Hollande, including lifting the ban on MON810 corn and encouraging scientific innovation:

- To create the technical and social conditions of coexistence between GM and conventional crops and to finally enforce the law "GMO" 2008 allowing freedom of choice for farmers.
- Not to repeat past practices of manipulation of the scientists engaged in risk assessment practices. In particular, we are asking for the High Council of Biotechnologies to be re-designed and in particular the dissolution of the "Economic, Social and Ethical Committee" which has never performed its function, and whose composition does not comply with the statutes enshrined in law after its implosion in January 2012.
- To break with the past misuse of scientific evidence to justify a political ban of GMO cultivation.
- To promote fair and objective information on plant biotechnology and in other areas where confusion reigns supreme.

Eight crop varieties, including corn and sugar-beets, have already been deemed safe by the EFSA, the first step in authorizing use of GM crops (MON810 was approved as far back as 1998). However, as [Nature News reported](#), "political disquiet over the cultivation of GM crops...has meant that the [European

Commission] has not moved forward on any of them.” In July, Monsanto decided to drop all requests except for the MON810 strain because of these delays.

Because the original approval on MON810 only lasted ten years, Monsanto reapplied for approval in 2007, but the European Commission has yet to make a decision.

Additional Resources:

- [“What the French ban of Bt MON810 maize means for science-based risk assessment,”](#)
Nature Biotechnology