

Letter to President Clinton to Support an Effective Biosafety Protocol

January 18, 2000

The Honorable William J. Clinton
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500
Re: The Biosafety Protocol to the Convention on Biological Diversity

Dear President Clinton:

In the face of increasing evidence that genetically engineered organisms pose a significant risk to the environment, Friends of the Earth (FoE) urges you to support the establishment of an effective Biosafety Protocol to the Convention on Biological Diversity.

A strong Biosafety Protocol is critical in order to regulate the growing use, handling and transfer of genetically engineered organisms (or living modified organisms (LMOs) worldwide. Scientific studies conducted over the past year have shown that genetically engineered crops can harm non-target insects such as the Monarch butterfly and beneficial insects such as the lacewing and the ladybug. In addition, studies have shown that toxins from genetically engineered B.t. crops leach through plant roots into the soil where they persist and harm soil health.

A century of severe environmental consequences resulting from bio-invasions of non-indigenous species, such as the kudzu vine or Dutch Elm disease, underscores the importance of taking strong precautionary measures to prevent ecological damage from genetically engineered organisms.

As witnessed in recent FDA public hearings, U.S. citizens are increasingly concerned about the effects of genetically engineered foods and crops on their health and the environment and favor stronger regulations governing genetically engineered products.

FoE believes that for a workable and effective Protocol, a coherent package of measures is required that ensures as a minimum the following:

- Safeguards covering all LMOs, including those LMOs intended for food, feed or processing.
- That the development of protective human health and environmental regulations not be constrained by trade interests, and, therefore, that international trade agreements including the WTO not be used to undermine biosafety.
- The right of all parties to decline importation of LMO's based on scientific, socio-economic, or cultural reasons.
- The right of Parties to use the precautionary principle as the basis for decision-making about LMOs. In other words, where an activity raises threats of harm to the environment or human health, precautionary measures should be taken, even if some cause and effect relationships are not fully established.
- The establishment of an effective regime for liability and compensation in the event of harm arising as a consequence of LMO imports.

FoE is deeply concerned that the U.S. Government, as a leader of the Miami Group of LMO export nations, obstructed progress on these issues at the Biosafety meeting in Cartagena last year, in direct contradiction to the wishes of the majority of world governments and international civil society.

Around the world, global public opinion demonstrates a strong desire for transparency and accountability in all environmental safety issues, including biosafety. It is also in the interests of U.S. business to support the establishment of fair and open safety precautions under the Biosafety Protocol. For instance, importation of inadequately tested LMO's could undermine U.S. farmers by damaging or contaminating their crops.

FoE urges the U.S. government to show global leadership on this critical multilateral environmental agreement. If the U.S. cannot support and does not intend to sign a strong Protocol, then we urge you to refrain from undermining the efforts of the majority of countries that do support a strong protocol.

Sincerely,

Brent Blackwelder
President, Friends of the Earth

Sarah Newport
Coordinator, Safer Food, Safer Farms Campaign

Cc:
David Sandalow, Assistant Secretary of State, Bureau of Oceans and
International Environmental and Scientific Affairs
Dan Glickman, Secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture
Charlene Barshefsky, U.S. Trade Representative
Carol Browner, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Jane Henney, U.S. Food and Drug Administration
Al Gore, Vice President