



Foreign Agricultural Service

**GAIN Report**

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## **Belgium-Luxembourg**

### **Biotechnology**

## **Anti-GMO Food Promotions in Belgium this Week**

### **2000**

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#### **Report Highlights:**

**Belgian consumer groups, Greenpeace and food retailers combined forces this week to inform the public of the "risks" of GMO foods and of efforts by retailers to reformulate their products and to label them.**

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Includes PSD changes: No

Includes Trade Matrix: No

Unscheduled Report

Belgium-Luxembourg [B11], BE

**Several major Belgian retailers, consumer groups and Greenpeace began "anti-GMO" campaigns last week. These are expected to last through the end of this week.**

Greenpeace has stepped up the pressure on retailers by publishing a "Product Guide With or Without GMOs." Over 100,000 "Guides" have been distributed, with the continuously updated list available on their website at [www.greenpeace.fr](http://www.greenpeace.fr), in french.

Consumer organizations are scheduled to locate staff in supermarkets and in supermarket parking lots to place fluorescent labels on products which may contain GMOs and to discuss the risks of genetic manipulation with shoppers.

GB supermarkets, one of the largest Belgian food retailers, publicized its private label products which "still" contain GMO ingredients. They claim that at the beginning of 2000, they offered 15 GMO products and have reduced the number to seven. They expect to have none within the next three months, stating that "the current climate of uncertainty concerning the potential health and environmental effects of GMOs has compelled the company to adopt this position." In addition, the company stated that it would not offer any new foods containing GMO's as long as "more transparency about the risks is not established."

Delhaize, another major Belgian food retailer, vaguely declared that they began withdrawing all GMO food from their shelves "from the beginning." Since then, Delhaize claims to have pressured food processors through retailer associations to reformulate their products and exclude GMO ingredients.

**Comment:**

Slightly more than one year ago, the Government of Belgium was supporting GMOs. In a public seminar on GMOs, the Belgian Ministers of Agriculture and Health expanded on the benefits of biotech foods and drugs. In a recent private conversation with executives from the Belgian food processing industries, they opined that GMOs are no longer an issue for their members. Most have reformulated to exclude GMO food ingredients. The few who have not reformulated are labeling the few GMO remaining foods.

OAA industry sources indicate that food safety is the important topic at this moment for Belgian food processors. In light of last year's dioxin scare, Belgian consumers are seeking greater assurances that their food safety system is secure.

We understand that the next target is GMOs in animal feed. Greenpeace already began pursuing this late last year, taking samples of a corn gluten feed shipment destined for Amsterdam and Dutch dairy farms. The Dutch dairy industry reacted strongly to the Greenpeace threat, announcing that they would not purchase milk from farmers using CGF. Since then, tensions have eased, especially since Greenpeace's claims were proven to be unfounded. Nevertheless, the episode demonstrated the industry's extreme sensitivity to the potential for their cheeses being branded by Greenpeace or

consumer groups as "GMO cheeses."