

France bans strain of Monsanto genetically modified maize

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A bag containing "MON 810," a variety of genetically modified maize developed by Monsanto Company is shown ripped open anti-GMO activists in January in France. French Agricultural Minister Bruno Le Maire imposed Friday a temporary ban on the strain "to protect the environment".

French Agricultural Minister Bruno Le Maire imposed Friday a temporary ban on a genetically modified strain of maize made by US company Monsanto "to protect the environment".

The French agriculture ministry said in a statement that the Monsanto maize strain MON 810 had been banned as a "precautionary measure".

France's top administrative court in November overturned a government order banning French farmers from planting genetically modified crops from Monsanto.

However, President Nicolas Sarkozy swiftly pledged to seek new legal measures after the French ruling as well as a similar decision by the European Court of Justice.

France's agriculture ministry imposed a ban in February 2008 amid concerns over public safety, but the French State Council said the government had failed to prove that Monsanto crops "present a particularly elevated level of risk to either human health or the environment".

Monsanto markets MON 810 maize -- which has been modified at a genetic level to include DNA from a bacteria -- under the trade name YieldGuard as being resistant to insect pests that can threaten harvests.

But some governments believe it could pose a danger to plants and animals.

France's ecology ministry in February said it had asked the European Commission to suspend authorisation for the use of MON 810 crops as studies show that they "pose significant risks for the environment."

The ministry pointed to a recent study by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) that raised concerns with another form of GM crop, BT11, that it said could also be applied to MON 810.

The European Commission requested the opinion of the EFSA on France's request, but said it wouldn't take any steps in the meantime.

"If the European Union does not act, we can invoke the safeguard clause" which allows EU nations to independently restrict or prohibit the sales of products, the French agricultural ministry said.

Monsanto said in January that it had no intention of selling GM maize in

France as it felt the market was not ready.

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