

Mexico Bans Genetically Modified (GM) Corn and Glyphosate Pesticide Despite Intense Pressure



Mexican president Andrés Manuel López Obrador has pledged to phase out use of the herbicide glyphosate and the cultivation of genetically modified corn and, eventually, GM corn imports. Under NAFTA, the United States has seen a 400% increase in corn exports to Mexico. Obrador's policies have begun to favor Mexican producers, particularly small-scale farmers, and to protect consumers alarmed by the rise of chronic diseases associated with high-fat, high-sugar processed foods. GM corn producers and exporters in the US are considering lawsuits against Mexico over the bans. Mexico is only banning GM corn, however, natural corn crops will be allowed to be imported into Mexico. -GEG

Mexican president Andrés Manuel López Obrador quietly rocked the agribusiness world with his New Year's Eve decree to phase out use of the herbicide glyphosate and the cultivation of genetically modified corn. His administration sent an even stronger aftershock two weeks later, clarifying that the government would also phase out GM corn imports in three years and the ban would include not just corn for human consumption but yellow corn destined primarily for livestock. Under NAFTA, the United States has seen a 400% increase in corn exports to Mexico, the vast majority genetically modified yellow dent corn.

The bold policy moves fulfill a campaign promise by Mexico's populist president, whose agricultural policies have begun to favor Mexican producers, particularly small-scale farmers, and protect consumers alarmed by the rise of obesity and chronic diseases associated with high-fat, high-sugar processed foods.

In banning glyphosate, the decree cites the precautionary principle and the growing body of scientific research showing the dangers of the chemical, the active ingredient in Bayer/Monsanto's Roundup herbicide. The government had stopped imports of glyphosate since late 2019, citing the World Health Organization's warning that the chemical is a "probable carcinogen."

The prohibitions on genetically modified corn, which appear toward the end of the decree, have more profound implications. The immediate ban on permits for cultivation of GM corn formalizes current restrictions, ordered by Mexican courts in 2013 when a citizen lawsuit challenged government permitting of experimental GM corn planting by Monsanto and other multinational seed companies on the grounds of the contamination threat they posed to Mexico's rich store of native corn varieties. The import ban cites the same environmental threats but goes further, advancing the López Obrador administration's goals of promoting greater food self-sufficiency in key crops. As the decree states:

"[W]ith the objective of achieving self-sufficiency and food sovereignty, our country must be oriented towards establishing sustainable and culturally adequate agricultural production, through the use of agroecological practices and inputs that are safe for human health, the country's biocultural diversity and the environment, as well as congruent with the agricultural traditions of Mexico."

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