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Please reject RTRS-certified soy

We are writing to you about the new label for "responsible" soy, which is about to be launched in various European countries. We oppose the Round Table on Responsible Soy (RTRS), the initiative that produced this label, as it will not stop deforestation, will label genetically modified Roundup Ready soy as responsible and sustainable, and will divert attention from real solutions to the problems associated with soy.

The RTRS has been condemned by 230 civil society organizations in over 30 countries.[1] These groups point out reasons why retailers should not back the RTRS, such as:

- Inclusion of unsustainable GM soy production as "responsible"

- Failure to protect rural communities and public health from the effects of soy expansion and production (much of the soy that will qualify for RTRS certification is produced under conditions that compromise human rights and damage rural communities to an extent that would concern your customers)

- The weakness of the RTRS standard's forest protection clause, which will fail to protect forests and other vulnerable lands from clearance for soy production, contributing to global warming and destruction of biodiversity

- Lack of civil society support across the globe and especially in producer countries.

Retailers may believe that their participation in the RTRS will result in improvements to the standard. Sadly, experience shows that this is not the case. Instead of getting stronger with each version, the RTRS standard has been progressively weakened. For example, its criteria on on-farm work conditions and land use rights are weaker in the 2010 version than in the 2009 version.[2] [3]

The RTRS standard is especially weak in defining who has the authority to make decisions that a given piece of land being put forward for soy expansion is "native forest" or other land of high conservation value.[4]

In short, the RTRS standard does not live up to any definition of "sustainability" or "responsibility".[5] Nor does it adequately tackle the wider issues associated with soy expansion such as displacement of communities and farmland, global food security, and health and social impacts.

RTRS's recent move to include non-GM soy as an option in its certification programme[6] fails to address the problem of its willingness to certify GM soy as responsible. The problems with this are:

- The vast majority of RTRS soy will be GM.

- A large body of scientific research has shown that GM soy, and the glyphosate/Roundup herbicide it is engineered to be sprayed with, cause unacceptable damage to human and animal health and the environment. The tolerance of RR soy to glyphosate leads to indiscriminate spraying over large areas, often by airplane, contaminating water, soil, and air, destroying food crops, and causing health problems in people.[7]

- Continuous use of glyphosate leads to the spread of glyphosate-resistant weeds, which in turn leads to use of more herbicides – including mixtures of older and highly toxic herbicides.[8]

- Soil is left poisoned, depleted, and unable to support any other crop (a process known as "desertification").[9]

Because of these problems, there is a large and growing resistance movement in soy-producing areas of South America to the GM soy/glyphosate model of farming.[10] [11] [12] In Europe, consumer rejection of GM food in Europe is strong and increasing. A 2010 Eurobarometer poll found that the majority (66%) of Europeans are worried about GMOs in food and drinks, a rise from 2005 figures.[13]

Given these facts, the RTRS's willingness to label GM soy as responsible could be viewed as highly misleading. Being associated with the RTRS in any way, and using soy sold under the RTRS label, poses a risk to your brand. We ask that you require your buyers and suppliers to ensure that the products sold in your stores do not contain RTRS-certified soy and that your dairy products, meat, and eggs are from animals not raised on RTRS-certified soy.

Instead we suggest you work with your buyers and suppliers to move to more genuinely sustainable solutions, including replacing imported soy animal feed with grass and other locally produced feed, changing farm support systems, and shifting school and hospital food procurement to low-impact meat and dairy. You could also start to look at product formulations and consumer education on more sustainable diets that use less, but better quality, meat and dairy. Until these solutions are implemented, there are abundant supplies of non-GM, more sustainable soy available, certified to the Basel Criteria.

We are keen to ensure that the public are not misled by claims that imported RTRS soy is sustainable. We will warn the public that despite misleading promotions by the RTRS (one of which actually used GM-free soy certified to the more stringent Basel Criteria, not RTRS-certified soy), the bulk of RTRS-certified soy will be GM, sprayed with toxic Roundup, and produced in massive industrial monocultures.

Please let us know your response, which we would like to make public.

Signed:

ActionAid UK	Global Forest Coalition
ASEED Europe	GM-Free Cymru
Corporate Europe Observatory	GM-Free Ireland Network
European Coordination Via Campesina	GM-free Scotland
Food and Water Europe	GM Freeze (UK)
Friends of the Earth Europe	GMWatch (UK)
Friends of the Earth International	Rainforest Rescue (Rettet den Regenvald)
Friends of the Earth UK	Save Our Seeds
gifsoja/toxicsoy.org	Soil Association (UK)

1. Open Letter: Growing Opposition to Round Table on Responsible Soy. June 2010. http://www.gmfreeze.org/page.asp?ID=431&iType=1079
2. RTRS Principles and Criteria for Responsible Soy: Field Testing Version. GA-OUT-01.2-ENG May 28, 2009.
3. RTRS Standard for Responsible Soy Production Version 1.0. RTRS_STD_001_V1-0_ENG. June 10, 2010.
4. RTRS Association, 2010. RTRS Standard for Responsible Soy Production Version 1.0. June 10, 2010. http://www.responsiblesoy.org/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_download&gid=275&Itemid=40&lang=en
5. RTRS Association, 2010. RTRS Standard for Responsible Soy Production Version 1.0. June 10, 2010. http://www.responsiblesoy.org/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_download&gid=275&Itemid=40&lang=en
6. The proposed non-GM module of the RTRS standard, while mentioned in RTRS Chain of Custody Standard Version 1.0, issued August 2010, is not mentioned in RTRS Accreditation and Certification Standard for Chain of Custody Certification Version 2.0, issued November 2010, or in RTRS Accreditation and Certification Standard for responsible soy production Version 3.1, issued December 2010. These documents are available from www.responsiblesoy.org. We conclude that the non-GM module is not yet operational.
7. Antoniou, M., Brack, P., Carrasco, A., Fagan, J., Habib, M., Kageyama, P., Leifert, C., Nodari, R., Pengue, W. 2010. GM Soy: Sustainable? Responsible? GLS Gemeinschaftsbank and ARGE Gentechnik-frei. http://bit.ly/9D9J2k
8. Antoniou, M., Brack, P., Carrasco, A., Fagan, J., Habib, M., Kageyama, P., Leifert, C., Nodari, R., Pengue, W. 2010. GM Soy: Sustainable? Responsible? GLS Gemeinschaftsbank and ARGE Gentechnik-frei. http://bit.ly/9D9J2k
9. Antoniou, M., Brack, P., Carrasco, A., Fagan, J., Habib, M., Kageyama, P., Leifert, C., Nodari, R., Pengue, W. 2010. GM Soy: Sustainable? Responsible? GLS Gemeinschaftsbank and ARGE Gentechnik-frei. http://bit.ly/9D9J2k
10. See, for example: Interviews with people affected by glyphosate spraying on GM soy. 2010. http://www.gmwatch.org/component/content/article/12479-reports-reports
11. Webber, J., Weitzman, H. 2009. Argentina pressed to ban crop chemical after health concerns. Financial Times. May 29. http://www.gene.ch/genet/2009/Jun/msg00006.html
12. Romig, S. 2010. Argentina court blocks agrochemical spraying near rural town. Dow Jones Newswires, March 17. http://bit.ly/cg2AgG
13. Special Eurobarometer Report 354-73.5. Food-Related Risks. Fieldwork: June 2010. Publication: November 2010. http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_354_en.pdf