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Mexico, first Latin American country to ban GMO maize and glyphosate

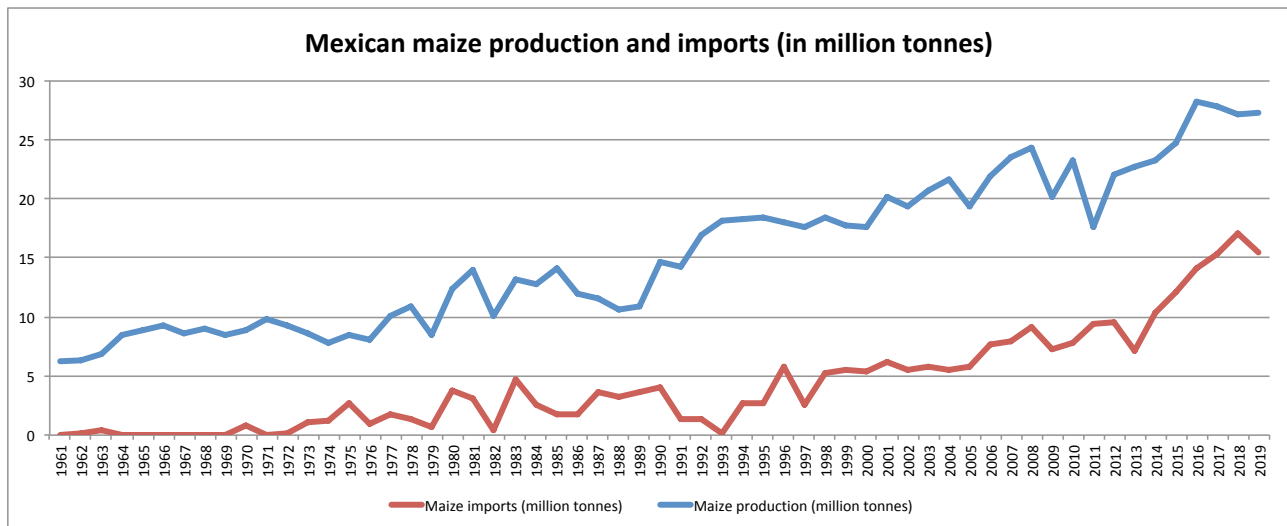
The Mexican government decided to ban GMO maize and glyphosate by 2024. A decree published on December 31 announced that federal biosecurity authorities would “revoke and refrain from granting permits for the release of genetically modified maize seeds into the environment”.

This decision, which fulfils the promise by the Mexican president Lopez Obrador to protect native maize varieties, comes after a series of stop and go choices by successive governments and courts over the years. The decree also envisages a progressive phasing out of GMO maize imports for use in the food industry. Left unclear is whether the ban applies for maize as animal feed.



The objective of the government is “food security and sovereignty” and the protection of “native maize, maize-fields, bio-cultural wealth, farming communities, gastronomic heritage and the health of Mexicans”.

Let's recall here that maize originates from Mexico and is the result of thousands of years of selection conducted by Mexican farmers on teosinte. Let's also keep in mind that since the implementation in 1994 of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) among Canada, Mexico and the United States, Mexican imports of maize (mostly GMO maize) from the US have grown tremendously, making the country increasingly dependent on its big northern neighbour for its main staple food. In 2019, Mexico imported 15.5 million tonnes of maize, compared to 2.7 million tonnes in 1994 and a few thousand tonnes annually in the 1960s. Over the same period, Mexico's yearly maize production jumped from 6 to 27 million tons (see graph).



Source: [FAOSTAT](#).

Along with the banning of GMO maize, the Mexican government decided to gradually reduce the use of Bayer/Monsanto's glyphosate herbicide leading to a ban by 2024. It is believed that three years will be sufficient for farmers to find alternative ways to combat weeds.

This decision is in contrast with the cacophony observed in the EU. Let's remember that following the categorisation of glyphosate as "probably carcinogenic" by the [International Agency for Research on Cancer](#) (IARC), in March 2015, the [European Food Safety Authority](#) (EFSA), whose independence towards the industry has often been considered doubtful, declared glyphosate "improbably carcinogenic" a few months later. This resulted in a renewal of the authorisation of glyphosate in the EU until 2022, freedom being given to countries to eventually ban it earlier (the only European country who did it to date being Luxembourg).

The reaction to the Mexican government's decision has been strong criticisms by the main agricultural lobby and praise by organic growers and civil society organisations. On the one hand, arguments included loss of competitiveness of farmers and food chains (because of heavy dependence on GMO maize imports from the US), on the other hand, it ranged from protection of biodiversity to improved health of consumers.

Mexico will, however, face difficulties in applying the ban on glyphosate unless feasible alternatives are found and practical steps are being taken to prepare its implementation.

At hungerexplained.org, we have already had the opportunity to write that in the case of glyphosate, just looking for “an alternative molecule” is not the solution, as whichever new molecule is found, it is likely to have its own unexpected negative effects. The solution is in developing adapted technological packages that build on and work with ecosystem processes and complementarities, not against them, rather than to rely on increasingly artificial ecosystems. These packages should also fit in a variety of social, economic and agroecological conditions.

Moreover, the Mexico will have to boost tremendously its maize production, while eliminating its GMO maize plots, and/or change the sources of supply of its imports.

In other words, this double ban will be quite a challenge for the country, if its objective is to be achieved and if it is not just a symbolic decision.

Selection of past articles on hungerexplained.org related to the topic:

- [Pesticides: an issue that poisons our agriculture](#), 2020.
- [The European Union and glyphosate: an illustration of one of the principles that govern our society](#), 2016.
- [Genetic resources - acceleration of privatisation of living organisms is a threat to food security and biodiversity](#), 2013.
- [GMOs: set-back in Latin America and hope in Europe for multinational seed companies](#), 2013.