



# PRESS RELEASE

## Naturland on the occasion of World Bee Day on 20th May

**Bee mortality on a global scale: beekeeping in Mexico threatened by illegal cultivation of GMO soya – honey importers write to the Mexican president**

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**Gräfelfing – Global bee mortality is one of the most menacing consequences of industrial agriculture. The use of pesticides is as much a threat to the bees as is the general state of our agricultural landscapes. In Germany clearance of vast areas is occurring to an ever greater extent, leading to a drastic decline in habitat for bees and other insects.**

“Generally speaking, what we need is greater organic diversity on our meadows and fields, rather than more agro-chemicals “, declares Hubert Heigl, president of Naturland, organic agricultural association, on the occasion of World Bee Day on 20<sup>th</sup> May. He added that this applies more especially in the global context, where bees and diversity are under threat from the genetic engineering of plants and the associated massive application of pesticides.

### **Support for the Mayan beekeepers – letter to the Mexican president**

A recent example is Mexico, where the natural forests found on the thinly populated Yucatan peninsula are an important habitat for numerous wild bees and honey bees. This habitat is being destroyed increasingly by the illegal cultivation of GMO soya. This constitutes a threat not only to the bees but also to the livelihoods of the indigenous Mayan beekeepers, a good number of whom are Naturland beekeepers.

Naturland is supporting the campaign of the Mayan beekeepers to save their livelihoods. Together with numerous German and European honey importers, this international organic association is demanding that the Mexican president, Peña Nieto, at last introduces effective measures to stop the cultivation of GMO soya on the peninsula.

“Almost half of Mexico’s honey exports go to Germany. However, German consumers don’t like GMO, and not at all in honey.”, says Manfred Fürst, head of the international division of Naturland as well as the co-ordinator of the IFOAM Apiculture Forum, the international association of organic beekeepers. Germany is a major honey importer because only some 20% of its demand can be satisfied by domestic production.

### **European honey importers reject cultivation of GMO soya**

“We are standing in solidarity with the campaign of the Mayan communities to resist both the legal and illegal cultivation of GMO plants.” This is an extract from a letter written on the initiative of Naturland which F.E.E.D.M., the European honey association, as well as ten honey importers in Germany, Austria and Denmark have sent to President Peña Nieto. The letter emphasises the excellent quality of the Yucatan honey and at the same time warns that it would pose a threat to the economically important export of this product to Europe from this region.

Besides F.E.E.D.M., the European umbrella association of honey fillers and dealers, the members of which account for some 90% of total honey imports to Europe, the following businesses have also joined in signing the campaign letter to the Mexican government:

- Dreyer-Bienenhonig, Uelzen, Germany
- The Fair Trade Cooperative dwp eG, Ravensburg, Germany
- El Puente, Die Fair Trade Pioniere, Nordstemmen, Germany
- EZA Fairer Handel, Köstendorf, Austria
- GEPA - The Fair Trade Company, Wuppertal, Germany
- Honig-Wernet, Waldkirch, Germany
- HONIGMAYR, Tenneck, Austria
- HOYER, Polling, Germany
- Jakobsens Honey, Aulum, Denmark
- Sonnentracht, Bremen, Germany

## Background

In actual fact, GMO soya may no longer be cultivated on Yucatan peninsula since a decree to this effect was passed by Mexico's supreme court in 2015. At that time Naturland, in co-operation with beekeepers' associations and environmental and human rights organisations in all parts of the world, supported the Mayan communities in their legal battle. However, the battle is by no means over, as a delegation of Mayan beekeepers reported during a visit to the Naturland headquarters in Gräfelfing, Germany, in late 2017.

“In a monitoring operation in 2016 the Mexican government determined for itself that GMO soya continues to be cultivated. But too little has happened since”, complains Irma Gómez González, an agricultural engineer and beekeeping consultant. What is worse, its illegal cultivation and the application of pesticides lead to contamination of the groundwater and extensive illegal forest clearing. The pesticides weaken the bees or even deprive them of sustenance. Consequently, honey production decreases, an industry which constitutes the most important economic pillar of the Mayan families, besides agriculture.