

PRESS RELEASE

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European Commission's orientation debate on GMOs confirms existing rules and procedures – but fails to show leadership on the future policy

The European Commission's orientation debate on GMOs mainly focussed on the approval process, the existing inconsistencies of approach of its different responsible services and on the consequences for the future role of EFSA, the EU's central authority for safety assessments of biotech products. In addition, Commissioners discussed the need for practical solutions for the unavoidable presence of GMOs in imported products for which a solution needs to be found quickly, not least in view of the high dependency of Europe on feed imports.

As expected, the orientation debate was dominated by the various new GM products that are still stuck in the authorisation pipeline as Member States fail to apply the approval system they themselves have set in place. But the recent decision of Commissioner Dimas (Environment) to reject products against the explicit scientific advice of EFSA had put the whole science based approval system not only for GMOs but also for other products into question. On this point, the outcome of the debate is crystal clear: the approval system remains unchanged and the Commission will continue to use its decision making powers in line with it and solely based on science. *"We welcome this clarification."* commented Garlich von Essen, Secretary General of the European Seed Association; *"But the fact that it has become necessary to clarify such a principal point shows how deeply rooted the problem is"*. He specifically expressed concern that despite the general support expressed by the Commission for EFSA, the College had not been able to finally decide on a number of new products but instead had charged the authority for reviews or further analysis: *"The Commission should have followed its own argumentation. Where the science is clear, a decision should follow suit. The science is for EFSA to establish and it did just that. The decision was for the Commission to take - and they should have done so."*

The second important issue tackled by Commissioners was the import of products that contain GMOs that are not yet authorised in the EU. Theoretically, these products should thus not be placed on the market in Europe. *"The main reason is the continuous delay of authorisations in Europe"* von Essen underlines. *"If we would be applying our system properly and on time, many of the problems would be solved"*. But von Essen has another reason for welcoming the debate and the conclusion of Commissioners that something needs to be done. *"It seems that the Commission catches up with the biological and economic reality - 100% purity and segregation do not exist in farming. The more GMOs are used around the world, the more we will find traces of them in products destined for export to Europe."* While the Commission's official press statement only refers to this issue for feed and foodstuffs, von Essen is hopeful that this will also help the industry's quest for a solution for seed. *"The biology of the plants and the way they are grown, harvested and transported is the same, regardless of their regulatory status. If you accept the need to deal with adventitious presence of GMOs in food and feed, you must accept it for seed as well."*

ESA

ESA is the voice of the European seed industry, representing the interests of those active in research, breeding, production and marketing of seeds of agricultural, horticultural and ornamental plant species.

Membership

Its membership consists of more than 50 direct company members and 35 national seed associations standing for several hundreds of seed enterprises all over Europe, the vast majority of them being small and medium sized businesses (SMEs).

Mission

ESA's mission is to work for effective protection of intellectual property rights relating to plants and seeds, fair and proportionate regulation of the European seed industry and freedom of choice for customers (farmers, growers, industry and consumers) in supplying seeds as a result of innovative, diverse technologies and production methods.

More information

For more information on ESA, its membership and work, please consult ESA's

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