



PRESS RELEASE

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ESA is the voice of the European seed industry, representing those active in research, breeding, production and marketing of seeds of agricultural and ornamental plant species. It represents 37 national seed associations (and with that more than 1000 seed businesses in the EU, most of them SMEs) and 55 direct company members.

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

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At a press conference in Brussels, European plant breeders and seed producers expressed their frustration on the failure of the European Commission to act on the issue of thresholds for the presence of GMOs in their conventional seeds. In a public “Call for Action” the seed industry called upon the Commission to urgently adopt and present a legislative proposal.

“For 10 years now, we and many others address the Commission on the need to set such thresholds - without any legislative proposal put forward.”, Garlich von Essen, Secretary General of ESA (European Seed Association) summed up the frustration. “Instead of an increasing understanding of the severe economic and legal problems caused by this inaction, we feel that we face an increasing lack of willingness to assume the responsibility and take leadership in this Commission.”

Seed industry, farmers, Ministers for Agriculture (2006) and most recently Ministers for the Environment at their Council meeting of 4.12.2008 repeatedly called upon the Commission to move forward on this issue. With a growing GM production worldwide (2008 saw yet another increase of GM plantings to more than 125 mio ha) as well as in the EU itself (up 21% from last year for the seven countries growing GM maize) and with GM and conventional agriculture sharing the same open farming environment, the presence of GMOs in seed or harvested crops cannot be excluded. While such mixtures are accepted as “technically unavoidable” for feed and food products and only require a labeling for consumer information if a certain threshold is surpassed (currently 0.9%), no such rules exist for GMOs in conventional seed. “The Commission closes its eyes and ears from reality while the situation becomes worse and worse for our European seed companies” von Essen explains. “We have seen field destructions and even criminal charges pressed against our companies and their employees – this is unacceptable. All it takes to end this legal uncertainty is to set a practicable technical labeling rule also for seed”.

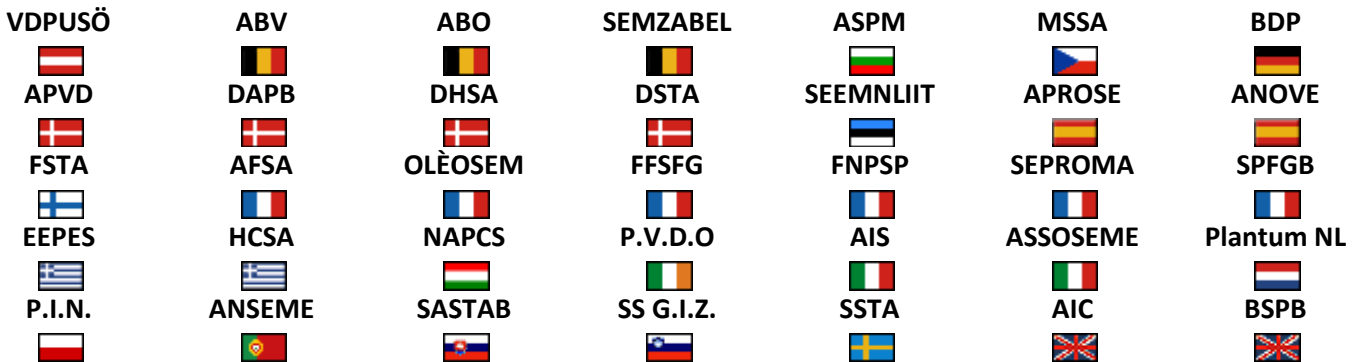
The industry is specifically critical of the deterioration of Europe's internal market for seed. Established already in the late 1960s and governed by a set of directives setting EU-wide standards and rules, the absence of a GM labeling threshold has led to a number of different national rules and procedures established by Member States and even by individual regions. “The internal market for seed is key to the competitiveness of our businesses, but also for farmers. Especially our many small and medium sized companies, that are still characteristic for Europe's seed industry structure, are unable to work with such a patchwork of rules and regulations.”, G. von Essen underlines the importance of a level playing in a Common Market. “The preservation of Europe's Common Market is quite rightly the core responsibility of the Commission. We can't accept that this responsibility is not taken up and that the resulting damage to the competitiveness of Europe's seed industry and its farmers is neglected for so long. It is crucial for the companies, for their employees and the sustainability of this industry in Europe that the necessary action is taken. Now!”, Garlich von Essen concluded the presentation.

Seed companies and associations that are direct members of ESA:

INDIVIDUAL SEED COMPANIES (47)



NATIONAL SEED ASSOCIATIONS (35)



ASSOCIATE MEMBERS (8) AND OBSERVERS (2)

