

# Commission 'sitting on' GMO report

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The European Commission is sitting on the results of a study on GMO traces in conventional seed in a bid to avoid legislating on the sensitive issue, industry sources told *Agra Europe*.

Setting new workable thresholds for adventitious presence of GMO 'dust' in conventional seed could be put off until 2010, it is feared, amid suspicions that the current Commission is unwilling to move on the sensitive issue.

An impact assessment is understood to have been completed last year, showing that the lowest thresholds under consideration - like the current zero tolerance threshold - entail punishing costs and are not workable.

The current inaction is said to be damaging the EU's seed market, with different member states imposing varying rules - some heavily penalizing farmers and seed producers for the presence of GM seed in conventional seed.

### **'Unavoidable' comingling**

GM crops are grown in the EU for trials and production, which can lead to small traces of GM seeds from nearby crops being found in conventional seed - known as 'adventitious presence.'

Seed is also imported to Europe from countries where GM seeds and crops are produced - another factor which can lead to adventitious presence. The Commission recognizes that adventitious presence is in many cases unavoidable.

Industry sources explained that the scale under consideration stretches from 0.1% up to 0.9% adventitious presence (AP), which is the level of GMO presence above which biotech ingredients must currently be labeled in food and feed.

Using the same threshold level for seed is an option the Commission is said to be looking at.

Industry officials explained that the Commission's eventual proposals should take into account the specificity of adventitious presence in seed and should focus on how many GMO plants would sprout per bag of seed at a given AP level.

### **'Politics' delaying proposals**

The Commission claims to be finalizing its assessment at present, but cannot provide a timeframe - despite the study initially having been due for completion last year.

Industry officials fear that politics is interrupting the process, with Environment Commissioner Stavros Dimas seen to be delaying the issue until the end of the Commission's tenure (likely to be the end of 2009).

The sector is said to need clear workable thresholds, with further delay seen as the worst option.

Once thresholds are established, harmonizing the methods for detecting and assessing AP across member states is seen as another goal.

It is currently possible to achieve widely different AP results with two different tests on the same bag of seed.