

EU tightens GM food law

A new directive came into force in the European Union on 17 October 2002 placing tighter restrictions on genetically modified crops. It states that GM foods may pose environmental and health risks and every country proposing to import them should conduct a detailed assessment of those risks. Governments will also have statutory duty to consult the public. Environmental pressure groups have welcomed some of the measures but they fear that the EU may now lift its moratorium on approving new GM products.

EU agricultural ministers reach agreement on beneficial GM technology

European Agriculture Ministers reached a political agreement on the Genetically Modified (GM) Food and Feed Proposal. Member States voted for a decentralised environmental safety assessment of GM seeds for growing, thus rejecting the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) as the central management body. Ministers agreed to a 0.5% level of GM material that can be present at trace levels (adventitious presence) in food and feed products. This only applies to GM material judged as safe by a relevant scientific committee before the Regulation enters into application. The Commission's proposal to label any food and feed product that has more than 1% of GM material was reduced to 0.9%. This is not a matter of food safety as this refers to products approved for use in the EU. The Environment Ministers are due to reach a common position on the traceability and labelling of GM products at their 9th and 10th December meeting. The two proposals will then go back to the European Parliament for a second reading in the first half of 2003.

European Parliament supports Commission to lift the de-facto moratorium on GMOs

The European Parliament has recommended that the 4-year de-facto moratorium on genetically modified organisms (GMOs) be ended. In adopting the Damaio report in Plenary, the Parliament supported and encouraged the Commission's Communication published earlier this year on 'Life

sciences and biotechnology – a strategy for Europe'.

Dow AgroSciences and Monsanto agreement

Dow AgroSciences and Monsanto have announced an agreement for a series of licenses and product and technology options. As part of the agreement, Monsanto will provide Dow AgroSciences with commercial, non-exclusive, royalty-bearing licenses relating to Roundup Ready corn, cotton, soybeans and canola, as well as YieldGard corn. Dow AgroSciences is providing similar licenses to Monsanto for Herculex I corn and other products in the Latin American market (<http://www.monsanto.com> or <http://www.dowagro.com>).

GM thresholds for seeds limited by EU

New draft European proposals for allowed contamination of seed by GM seeds propose a limit of 0.3% in oilseed rape seed batches. English Nature has said that this is too high as it would permit 10,000 seeds per hectare to be sown and this could harm wildlife. Other limits in the proposal are 0.5% for tomatoes, sugar beet, cotton, chicory, maize and potatoes and 0.7% for soybeans. Several environmental pressure groups are asking for a tolerance that approaches zero and Friends of the Earth are urging European Union agriculture and environment ministers to scrap the proposal as it stands.

Canadian and US scientists say GM food is 'safe'

The Canadian Biotechnology Advisory Committee (CBAC), a panel of 20 top scientists, was formed by the Canadian government to advise on aspects of GM crops and food derived from them. In late August 2002, it issued a landmark report in which it recommended against mandatory labelling of GM foods but, more importantly, the panel also stated that GM foods posed no risk to human health. In a separate report, the US Institute of Food Technologies (IFT) has concluded that crops modified by modern molecular and cellular methods do not pose risks different from those posed by earlier methods of food production and processing (<http://www.cbac-ccc.ca/>).

CTIC study says GM crops are good for the environment

A Conservation Technology Information Center (CTIC) study claims that GM crops reduce the need to plough and this results in less erosion of topsoil and reduced air and water pollution. The report says that conservation tillage has increased by 35% since GM crops were introduced with a total of more than 55 million acres in the USA (<http://www.ctic.purdue.edu>).

Maize genome sequencing

The US National Science Foundation has awarded grants of \$10.2 million over two years to two projects for sequencing the maize genome. One is led by the Donald Danforth Plant Science Centre in collaboration with Purdue University, the Institute for Genomic Research and Orion Genomics and the other is led by Rutgers University in collaboration with the University of Arizona, Genoscope (France) and the Munich Information Centre for Protein Sequencing (Germany).

Snippets

...EPA approval is being sought by Monsanto for its genetically-modified *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) corn seed known as YieldGuard Rootworm. Seed to plant 1 M acres is to be marketed by Monsanto initially, rising to 47 M acres eventually.

...market approval for a GM rice that eliminates a protein causing allergic reactions in kidney dialysis patients is being sought by Syngenta in Japan.

...the Australian Cotton Research and Development Corporation has said that the use of broad-spectrum insecticides on cotton farms has fallen by 70% since the first GM crops were introduced (<http://www.crdc.com.au/>).

...Oregon voters have overwhelmingly rejected an initiative to make the state the first in the USA to require labeling of genetically modified foods. Only 28% of Oregon voters supported the voter-sponsored initiative, compared with 72% who voted against it, according to results from 42% of precincts in the state.