



Newsletter

Commission reports on national measures to ensure coexistence of genetically modified crops with conventional and organic farming

The development of EU-wide legislation on the coexistence of genetically modified crops with conventional and organic farming does not appear justified at this time, in view of the EU's limited experience with the cultivation of GM crops and the need to conclude the process of introducing national measures. This is the main conclusion of a new report from the European Commission. However, before any decision is taken, the Commission will engage in an in-depth consultative process with stakeholders. The Vienna conference on 5 and 6 April will provide an ideal opportunity for this.

'The development of efficient and cost-effective strategies to ensure coexistence is vital to ensure a practical choice between GM and non-GM produce for farmers and consumers,' said Mariann Fischer Boel, Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development. 'This is not a question of health or environmental protection, because no GMOs are allowed on the EU market unless they have been proved to be completely safe. To ensure that consumers know exactly what they are buying the EU has developed an advanced labelling and traceability system for GMOs. Segregation measures must be in place to ensure that accidental traces of GMOs in conventional or organic products are kept within the strict ranges defined by EU legislation. Growing conditions are very varied from country to country and experience with GM crops is still limited in Europe. It therefore does not seem appropriate to propose unified EU rules at this time.'

Experience with the cultivation of GM crops remains extremely limited in the EU. Commercial cultivation has so far been limited to two types of GM maize. In Spain, GM maize cultivation amounted to 58 000 hectares in 2004, or about 12 % of total Spanish maize cultivation. In other Member States, cultivation is limited to a few hundred hectares. In Spain, GM maize has been grown since 1998 under a non-binding code of good practice.

On 23 July 2003, the Commission adopted a recommendation on guidelines for the development of national strategies and best practices, to help Member States develop national legislative or other strategies for coexistence. Most Member States are still developing national approaches, with specific coexistence legislation adopted in four Member States (Germany, Denmark, Portugal and partly Austria) by the end of

2005. Monitoring programmes still have to be set up and implemented in order to verify the effectiveness and economic feasibility of the measures taken.

Coexistence measures aim at protecting farmers of non-GM crops from the possible economic consequences of accidental mixing of crops with GMOs. The Commission recommendation states that coexistence measures should not go beyond what is necessary to ensure that accidental traces of GMOs in non-GM products stay below EU labelling thresholds in order to avoid any unnecessary burden for the operators concerned. Measures should be science-based and proportionate and must not generally forbid the growing of GM crops.

Most Member States have based their approaches on management measures applicable at the level of individual farms or in coordination between neighbouring farms. The onus of implementing segregation measures has generally been placed on GM crop growers. The very diverse nature of EU farming means that coexistence measures have to be adapted to local conditions and crop types, and make it imperative to ensure the maximum degree of flexibility for the Member States in developing their national approaches.

The Commission believes there is a need to gather further experience before departing from the current subsidiarity-based approach set out in the 2003 recommendation. However, it intends to take very careful notice of the opinions expressed by stakeholders. The coexistence conference organised in Vienna on 5 and 6 April 2006 will provide such an opportunity. In the meantime, the Commission proposes to strengthen its efforts to ensure the maximum cooperation between Member States, analyse the latest scientific and economic information available on segregation measures, develop jointly with the Member States best practices for technical segregation measures leading to crop-specific recommendations and obtain more information on national civil liability systems. In 2008, the Commission will report on the progress made, including an update on the development and implementation of national coexistence measures.

Please see: http://europa.eu.int/comm/agriculture/coexistence/index_en.htm

Sugar production: EU Member States agree to one-year cut

European Union governments today agreed on a Commission proposal for a one-year cut of 2.5 million tonnes (13.6%) in sugar, isoglucose and inulin syrup production. This one-off reduction is necessary to ensure that the newly reformed sugar regime gets under way without heavy surpluses undermining market balance. The production cut is divided up between the individual Member States according to a balanced weighting of the reduction coefficients traditionally used in the sugar sector and the linear cut laid down in the new common market organisation (CMO) regulation.

The coefficients reduce production more for those countries which previously had higher 'B' quotas: in other words those which produced more sugar for export. Under the sugar reform, this distinction between 'A' and 'B' quotas will disappear. In calculating the cut in production for 2006/07, special account will also be taken of those countries which undertake large reductions in quota in the first year of the reform through the newly introduced Restructuring Fund.

In February 2006, the EU agriculture ministers formally adopted a radical reform of the EU sugar sector which will come into force on 1 July 2006 and will ensure a long-term sustainable future for sugar production in the EU. The first marketing year under the reformed

sugar regime could be very difficult because of possible oversupply of the market, due to limited export possibilities and the fact that, in this first year, the effects of the Restructuring Fund will not yet be felt. The EU will use the export possibilities available under its international obligations, but will have to respect the ruling of the WTO appellate body and take account of budgetary constraints.

Following requests from a number of Member States to do so, the Commission proposed a reduction in sugar production under quota in the first year of the reform by 2.5 million tonnes (13.6%) in order to relieve the pressure on the market. This will improve the balance on the sugar market without creating new stocks of sugar.

The regulation agreed also fixes transitional arrangements to take account of the fact that the first year of the new regime will last 15 months. This is so that, in future, the marketing year will run from 1 October to 30 September every year.

News in brief

EU-US wine accord will help EU wine trade with United States

After the European Union and the United States signed a bilateral wine accord which will bring major benefits for EU wine producers, Commissioner for Agriculture, Mariann Fischer Boel raised her glass and said 'In today's increasingly competitive market place, it is vital that there are no unnecessary and burdensome barriers for our winemakers, who I believe are the best in the world'. The agreement, which was approved by EU agriculture ministers in December 2005, follows 20 years of negotiation. It will help EU winemakers to build on their current success in the USA, which is by far the EU's largest export market. Annual EU wine exports to the USA are worth more than EUR 2 billion, around 40% of EU wine exports in terms of value. This agreement provides a clear demonstration that the USA and the EU can resolve important and complex issues

through bilateral negotiations and both sides are committed to doing so in the future. The EU and the USA will start talks within 90 days on a more ambitious second-phase agreement.

London meeting brought key WTO negotiators together to prepare for April deadline

Trade negotiators from the EU, the USA, Brazil, India, Japan and Australia met in London this March for two days of talks intended to move forward the ongoing WTO Doha negotiations. With negotiators committed to resolving some key issues by the end of April 2006, this meeting was an important chance for some of the major players to close the ground between them. The aim was to put trade at the service of development, create consensus and give impetus to the wider negotiations in Geneva. The European Union, which chaired the meeting, was represented by Trade Commissioner, Peter Mandelson, and Agriculture Commissioner, Mariann Fischer Boel.

European Commission

Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development

Edited by: Eugène Leguen de Lacroix, European Commission Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development.

This publication does not necessarily express the official views of the Commission.

For further information: European Commission, Agriculture and Rural Development DG, B-1049 Brussels.

Tel. (32-2) 29-91111. Telex: COMEU B 21877.

Internet: http://europa.eu.int/comm/agriculture/index_en.htm

Text finalised on 23 March 2006