

Brussels, 15 April 2011

GMOs : Commission publishes report on socio-economic aspects of GMO cultivation in Europe

A European Commission report presented today demonstrates the current limitations in assessing the socio-economic implications of cultivation of genetically modified (GM) crops in the European Union. Specifically, the report to the European Parliament and the Council, which is based on information principally provided by Member States, reveals that the existing information is often statistically limited and that it is frequently based on already preconceived ideas about GMO cultivation. In the report, the Commission also presents an analysis of the socio-economic dimensions of GMO cultivation as reported in the international scientific literature and in the conclusions of research projects funded under the European Framework Programme for Research.

Health and Consumer Policy Commissioner, John Dalli said: "With the publication of this report, the Commission is delivering one of the last pending requests made by the Environment Council in December 2008. The document has been compiled on the basis of data and information provided by the Member States. I firmly believe that this report creates an opportunity: It is now up to the Member States, the Commission, the European Parliament and all interested parties, to fully grasp the report's findings and embark on an objective discussion on the potential role of socio-economic factors in the management of GMO cultivation in the European Union."

Key findings

Since the EU represents only a fraction of the worldwide surface dedicated to GM crops, the experience with GMO cultivation in Europe is admittedly limited. It is, therefore, no surprise that **the amount of statistically relevant information** on the ex-post socio-economic impacts of GMO cultivation **is rather limited**.

The economic data specific to the European paradigm concerned studies in Member States with experience in cultivation of herbicide-tolerant (HT) or pest-resistant (Bt) GM crops. These studies showed that, when the weed or pest pressure is high, **farmers cultivating HT and Bt GM crops could benefit from higher yields**.

In the report, social consequences and economic impacts of GMO cultivation on the other parts of the food chain were subject to significant comments. To complement the input by Member States, the report also provides a review of the existing international scientific literature on the social and economic dimension of GMO cultivation.

It demonstrates that economic analyses provide a good picture of the economic impact at farm level world-wide, in particular for HT and Bt crops. Once again, though, **available information on social impacts and effects along the food chain is rather limited, if not absent**.

Finally, the report provides a review of the findings of EU funded research projects addressing socio-economic perspectives of GMO cultivation (CO-EXTRA, SIGMEA, CONSUMERCHOICE).

Next steps

This **report is the starting point** for the Member States, the Commission, the European Parliament and all interested parties to deepen their reflection on this sensitive topic. However, in order to move forward in a sensible way, the Commission considers that **discussions should shift from the polarised perceptions** documented in the report to a more tangible and objective basis.

Therefore, the **Commission recommends defining a robust set of factors and indicators** to capture in a uniform way the socio-economic consequences of GMO cultivation across the EU and along the food chain.

The Commission also suggests initiating a **reflection** on the potential use of the improved understanding **of the socio-economic dimension in the management of GMO cultivation**.

Background

The Environment Council asked the Member States on 4 December 2008 to collect and exchange relevant information on the socio-economic implications of GMO cultivation across the food chain. It also asked the Commission to prepare, on the basis of this information, a report for due consideration and further discussion.

The Commission obtained the information through a questionnaire that covered:

- **Experienced (ex-post) socio-economic impacts** of GMO cultivation for those Member States having today, or having had in the past, experience with commercial cultivation of GM plants (i.e. Czech Republic, Germany, Spain, France, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Sweden).
- **Anticipated (ex-ante) impacts** if existing or new GM plants were to be cultivated on their territory.

The questionnaire was also sent to the Member States of the European Economic Area (Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein), and was made available to the public. Twenty-five (25) Member States, Norway and several stakeholders completed the questionnaire. The Commission received the last contribution in January 2011.

For more information please see:

http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/biotechnology/index_en.htm