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New Parliament re-asserts its opposition to GMOs

Today, the new Parliament adopted its first three GMO objections - that is, objections to three different GM crops (two maize and one soybean) that the European Commission proposes to authorise for import into the EU for food (for humans) and feed (for livestock).

Sadly, although these are the first objections that many new MEPs have voted on, the Parliament is no stranger to this issue. In its last term, [the Parliament adopted a total of 36 cross-party objections to GMOs](#) led by the Greens/EFA group. Let's now hope that the new Commission will have the political courage to respect the call from citizens and the European Parliament to stop GMO authorisations and imports into Europe.

Why we don't want them

Health risks

The vast majority of GM crops, including the three objected to today, have been genetically engineered so that they are **tolerant to one or more herbicides**. This modification allows herbicides to be used to kill weeds throughout the cultivation of the GM crop, without killing the crop itself, up until the time of harvest.

However, over-use of these herbicides, mostly glyphosate, on GM crops has led to the development of herbicide resistant weeds **resulting in a continuously higher use of those herbicides**, likely leading to a higher quantity of residues in the harvest.

This heavy dependence on chemical input has implications for health, the environment and biodiversity in the countries of cultivation, and may **pose risks to health for consumers and animals in the EU** if the GM crops are authorised for import for food and feed.

The two maizes and soybean voted on today have been made **tolerant to herbicides containing glyphosate and/or glufosinate**. Glufosinate is no longer authorised for use in the EU and is toxic for reproduction. Questions around glyphosate's carcinogenicity remain.

However, there are **gaps in the assessment procedure for GMOs**. The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), in charge of this safety assessment do not assess the herbicide residues on the GM crops, their combined toxicity nor their interaction with the GM plant itself.

This type of assessment should be a central part of the safety tests because, on GM plants, the way that herbicides are broken down by the plant, and thus composition and toxicity of the break-down products can be driven by the genetic modification itself.

In addition, some GM crops have also been engineered to produce insecticidal chemicals known as Bt toxins. A number of studies show that exposure to Bt toxins may affect the immune system. However, according to a former member of the EFSA GMO panel, tests carried out by EFSA are not appropriate for identifying unintended effects of Bt toxins on the immune system.

Until the **safety assessments are conducted in a way that can categorically rule out any risks to human and animal health**, we cannot agree to the authorisation of GM crops use in our food or feed systems.

Reducing the EU's impacts on deforestation

The GM soybean objections adopted today, states that **unless it can be shown that they do not contribute to deforestation, GM soybeans should not be authorised for import into the EU**. This is because GM soybean cultivation for export is a key driver of deforestation in countries such as Brazil and Argentina and authorising their import therefore undermines the EU's obligations under the UN Sustainable Development Goals, as well as the Paris Climate Agreement and international biodiversity goals.

Soybean import into the EU is mainly used for feeding industrial livestock, but reducing consumption of cheap meat and dairy would benefit not only the climate but also human health and animal welfare.

Furthermore, for the Commission to simultaneously authorise the import of crops produced with high quantities of herbicide whilst committing to reducing pesticide dependency in the EU is incoherent to say the least.

We don't need them!

GM plants do not fundamentally give any advantage to consumers: they are not healthier, nor even cheaper. The claim is that farmers growing them are able to simplify their farming practices, but herbicide tolerant GM crops and Bt toxins destroy soil fertility and biodiversity in the long run. Efficient alternatives to pest management exist and are being successfully used in, for example, organic farming.

Enough good food for everyone can be produced without GM crops, so why take the risk? Why undermine democratic decision making in the interest of a handful of biotech companies?

Will the next Commissioner for Health deliver on her promise?

Despite this opposition from the European parliament, elected to represent EU citizens, as well as a lack of support from Member States governments, the European Commission continues to authorise GMOs. So, will the new Commission listen?

When asked about GMO authorisations in her hearing with MEPs, we were very pleased to hear the Commissioner-designate for Health Ms Kyriakides say that she would respect democracy and listen to the Parliament's position. We hope she honours her word.

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Contact person



Joanna Sprackett

Advisor on Food Safety and Quality

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