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Press release | 29.04.2021

Strict rules must continue to apply to new forms of genetic engineering

Genetic Engineering

Today, the European Commission has presented its study on genetically modified organisms (GMOs), pointing out that new genomic techniques could reduce the use of pesticides, in line with the objectives of the Green Deal and the Farm-to-Fork Strategy. The main conclusion of the study is that existing GMO legislation is outdated and unfit for recent technological developments. So far, all types of genetic engineering are covered by EU rules for GMO authorisation, tracing and labelling.

The Greens/EFA as well as the authors of a study commissioned by the Greens/EFA Group call for the current regulatory approach to be maintained, in line with a ruling by the European Court of Justice. Should plants genetically modified with new techniques no longer fall under the strict EU regulation in the future, genetically modified plants will end up untested and unlabelled in food in the EU.

Tilly Metz MEP, Member of the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee, comments:

"The same strict EU rules on authorisation and labelling must apply to all genetically modified plants. The new techniques still mean genetic modification and should be subject to the same rules as all other GM techniques. The European Commission should not engage in the reinterpretation attempts of the seed industry. The European Court of Justice has clearly stated that the new genetic engineering methods fall under the EU GMO rules, and this judgement must be the benchmark for the European Commission. The Commission must adhere to the precautionary principle and not succumb to the promises of seed companies like Bayer and BASF, who are making money from old and new genetic engineering techniques."

Eleonora Evi MEP, Greens/EFA Member of the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, comments:

"People have a right to decide for themselves whether they buy food produced with genetic engineering. Clear labelling requirements provide freedom of choice for consumers. People must have the ability to choose food produced without genetic engineering, regardless of whether new or old methods of genetic engineering are involved."

Background

In its ruling of 25 July 2018, the European Court of Justice clearly stated that all types of genetically modified organisms fall under the strict EU rules for authorisation, insofar as the genetic engineering methods used were developed mainly since the 2001 EU directive. This also applies to new genetic engineering techniques such as the so-called "gene scissors" (CRISPR). The new technology can be used to modify genes without adding new ones.

According to a representative survey commissioned by the Greens/EFA Group, the vast majority (86 per cent) of respondents in the European Union who had heard of genetically modified crops want food produced with them to be labelled as such, regardless of the techniques used to produce them.

Study "Genome-edited plants in the EU - A Scientific critique of Leopoldina and EASAC statements".

GMO survey (diagrams) and background

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