



PRESS RELEASE

Commission procrastinates on GMOs while millions of farmers worldwide are growing them

Brussels, 7 May, 2008:

Today, the EU Commission held a debate on the biotech crop approval process in Europe and sent out a disappointing signal when it agreed to send back three cultivation dossiers which had been positively assessed. Europe is already lagging behind worldwide competition when it comes to biotech crops: more than 40 products are awaiting EU approval. Furthermore, in the light of the current bottlenecks in the supply of food and feed, it is unacceptable to keep putting off decisions by asking the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) to reconsider dossiers such as the three biotech crops for cultivation which came before the Commission today: two insect resistant corn varieties and the starch potato Amflora which had been positively assessed by EFSA years ago.

In doing so, European farmers are being denied access to the technology. In Europe, only one biotech crop is available for farmers, an insect-resistant Bt maize. Since 1998 not one single new biotech crop has been allowed to reach the market for cultivation. This stands in stark contrast to the 120 plus products for 23 crops available to farmers worldwide (1). With such politically motivated steps Europe is holding up a well-established technology and is putting its credibility at risk. The existing EU approval system, which has been agreed upon between the Commission, the Member States and the European Parliament includes a thorough examination involving the scientific assessment of each and every biotech crop and its potential environmental as well as health and safety impact. Europe is still just talking about the technology, while the rest of the world is moving ahead rapidly, causing Europe to become increasingly isolated. "Today's debate at the EU Commission is yet another example of procrastination. The system is in place, and it should be allowed to function," says Bernward Garthoff, Vice Chairman of EuropaBio – the EU association for bioindustries.

"Although we welcome the measures addressed to imports such as the Commission decision to ask Austria to lift its ban on two biotech maizes, and find a technical solution to the issue of low level presence before the summer, we would have hoped the Commission could have done more for European farmers so that they can actually cultivate more biotech crops and not just import them," says Nathalie Moll, Director of EuropaBio.

Europe wants and needs to reduce the environmental impact of agriculture and to mitigate the effects of climate change. Biotech crops can contribute to both these goals. With over ten years experience of commercial biotech planting, analysis has shown considerable biotech crop-related carbon dioxide emission savings (1). In 2006; these were equal to the removal off the roads of 6.5 million cars, equal to about 25% of all registered cars in the UK (2).

Biotech crops have been adopted by farmers at record pace around the world because they offer better protection of harvests – farmers can actually reap more of what they sow on the same amount of land. Biotech crops also decrease the need for spraying and reduce energy use as well as save on labour. Biotech can endow crops with special traits so that they can be grown in saline soils, or with less need of precious water resources.

At a time where food security is high on the agenda, as prices for agricultural commodities continue to surge globally with unprecedented speed, agricultural biotechnology has an important role to play in meeting the world's challenge to feed itself. It is unacceptable that Europe's hesitation to apply its own regulatory approval process is affecting developing countries that would like to take up this technology.

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITORS

(1) Brookes G and Barfoot P. (2006) GM crops: the first ten years – Global socio-economic and environmental impacts. ISAAA Brief N°36. ISAAA: Ithaca, NY.
<http://www.isaaa.org/resources/publications/briefs/36/download/isaaa-brief-36-2006.pdf>

(2) In 2007, the global biotech crop area grew 12 percent or 12.3 million hectares to reach 114.3 million hectares, the second highest area increase in the past five years. Two million more farmers planted biotech crops in 2007 making a total of 12 million farmers globally enjoying the advantages from the improved technology. Notably, 9 out of 10 of the benefiting farmers, were resource-poor farmers (11 million in total), exceeding the 10-million milestone for the first time. In fact, more developing countries planted biotech crops in 2007 than industrialized countries.
http://www.europabio.org/GBEne_ISAAA_130208.htm

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About EuropaBio

EuropaBio is the European Association for Bioindustries, solely and uniquely bringing together bioscience companies from all fields of research and development, testing, manufacturing and distribution of biotechnology products. It has 85 corporate members operating worldwide, 7 associate members, 5 BioRegions and 25 national biotechnology associations representing some 1800 small and medium sized enterprises involved in research. <http://www.europabio.org>
