

Brussels, October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2001



The European Association for Bioindustries

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**Plant Biotechnology Unit Comments on the Commission Proposal for a Regulation concerning**

***Genetically Modified Food and Feed***

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*European Parliament resolution on the Future of the Biotechnology Industry: The Committee on Industry, External Trade, Research and Energy – the “Purvis Report”: February 2001*

**“ supports efforts to develop biotechnological and genetic engineering procedures in the EU as one way of improving the economic viability of agriculture and food production in a manner which is at the same time environmentally sustainable.”**

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**EuropaBio strongly supports the long term vision, clearly stated over the past year by the European Commission, the European Parliament and Council, that biotechnology is a key component of the long term strategy to move Europe forward as the leading knowledge based economy by 2010.**

In achieving this goal, EuropaBio also supports rigorous evaluation of the safety of GM products, prior to their commercialisation, to safeguard consumer and environmental safety, and **welcomes those elements of the proposed GM Food and Feed Regulation that would set in place:**

- **A combined safety assessment and authorisation procedure** for foods and feeds from genetically modified crop plants;
- **A review of the safety assessment by a single, independent, European expert committee** - the European Food Authority (EFA); and,
- **Legal provisions that recognise the realities of adventitious presence** and procedures for establishing exemption thresholds for GM materials.

Nonetheless, there are a number of areas of the Commission’s proposal that require review in order to improve the effectiveness of the safety assessment, enhance consumer confidence in the regulatory process, while at the same time, encouraging the development of new innovative food and feed products. **Failure to address these concerns will act against the European Union’s long-term life sciences strategy.**

### **Role of the EFA**

- **Consumer confidence in the safety assessment of GM products will be enhanced by the knowledge that it is conducted by a single, independent expert committee – the European Food Authority.** In this respect, the responsibilities of the EFA must be clarified to clearly define its role.

### **Adventitious presence of genetically modified material**

- **Technically unavoidable traces of GM products will be present in other products** as a result of normal agricultural crop production, transport and processing.
- **EuropaBio supports derogations for the adventitious presence** of genetically modified material in the Commission's GM Foods and Feeds proposal and through amendments to Directive 2001/18.
- **These provisions must be extended to include adventitious presence from commercial products approved in third countries.** To avoid trade disruptions, timely procedures should be developed.

### **Labelling**

- **The current labelling regime for GM foods has failed to provide consumers with real choice** as it has discouraged food manufacturers and retailers from using GM products in food. Similarly, **the present proposal does not meet the stated objective of enhancing consumer choice.**
- **EuropaBio supports consumers' choice . This can only result from labelling policies that are practical, affordable and enforceable.**
- The Commission's proposal to require **process-based labelling of foods , where such labelling is not analytically verifiable, will be difficult to enforce and will undermine consumer confidence and trust in the labelling system.** For labelling provisions to be enforceable, reliable, validated methodology must be applied for detection of the presence of GM foods and feeds.

### **Responsibilities for implementation**

- **The obligations imposed on the authorisation holder are unworkable** and are inconsistent with the Commission's proposed framework on general food law.
- Multiple independent operators will use the authorised GMO and derived products in the food and feed chains and **applicants will not be in a position to ensure compliance by all of these operators** (e.g. compliance with labelling requirements).
- **Conditions of the authorisation should be applicable to operators at all stages of production and distribution in the food and feed chains**, and not only to the authorisation holder.

### **Scope and relationships with other EU legislation**

- To avoid confusion, **clarity and consistency is required in the authorisation process for all GM foods and feeds.** The scope of the foods covered by the regulation is unclear and in some cases, eg food additives, additional safety assessments and authorisations are required

under other Community legislation.

*EuropaBio welcomes the opportunity to discuss these points in further detail.*