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European Union

Biotechnology

Update on EU legislation for GMO Approvals

2003

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Report Highlights:

The European Parliament's Environment Committee agreed on amendments in the Second Reading of the Traceability and Labeling proposal. The amendments, which have to be voted at the July Plenary session of the Parliament, include lowering the permitted adventitious presence of GMO varieties from 0.9% to 0.5%. If these tough changes are approved, it is unlikely to be acceptable to the Council and would thus lead to Conciliation adding roughly two months of delay to the entry into force of this legislation.

Includes PSD Changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Unscheduled Report
Brussels USEU [BE2]
[E2]

Yesterday the European Parliament's Environmental Committee voted through a report with amendments on the Traceability and Labeling and Food and Feed proposals, key elements in the EU GMO approvals and authorizations legislation.

MEPs voted through several changes which could have a substantial impact, in part because they are at odds with the Council position. If at the July Plenary session of the European Parliament the changes are adopted, as the changes are unlikely to be acceptable for the Council, then it is very possible that the legislation will go to the conciliation procedure (where the EP and Council attempt to reconcile differences) – this would add roughly two months of delay to the entry into force of the legislation.

Amongst the key changes are the lowering of the adventitious presence of biotech event from 0.9% to 0.5% and to set to zero the adventitious presence of any non- (EU) authorized biotech events. The amendment, approved by the Committee, would thus require the labeling of any food or feed with more than 0.5% biotech events. Further, another amendment now provides a zero tolerance level for non-authorized biotech event. Before, the Council position has allowed 0.5% presence of biotech events that had a positive (EU) risk assessment, but not yet completed the entire regulatory approval process. Under the new EP proposals, no biotech event, even in minute quantities would be allowed into Europe until it had been through the EU regulatory procedures.

Crop seeds were also added to the list of products covered by this legislation, as well as a reference to demands on the co-existence of biotech and non biotech varieties.

In essence, the European Parliament have returned to their position after the first reading which was then modified by the Council.

Reaction from the Commission was hostile, from DG SANCO Spokesperson, Beate Gminder, "The Parliament has snubbed the U.S. This is a very adverse reaction". Europabio, a European biotech representation were also critical – "We're concerned as they keep changing the goalposts (for the lifting of the ban)".

Friends of the Earth however welcomed yesterday's moves and according to Geert Ritsema, "The vote is positive. Labeling is not enough in itself, we also need to guarantee GM-free supply".

Related USEU reports:

Report Number	Title	Date released
E23057	Commission requests 12 member states to adopt GMO legislation	4/11/2003
E23049	European public skeptical about GM agri-food	3/26/2003
E23029	Commission presents co-existence paper	3/05/2003

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