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France

Biotechnology

French President Announces Framework Law on Biotech Crops

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Approved by:

Besa L. Kotati
U.S. Embassy

Prepared by:

Marie-Cecile Henard/Xavier Audran

Report Highlights:

The French President officially announced that the government plans to shortly present a biotech legislation to the Parliament. This bill will not only be the transposition into national law of the EU Directive 2001/18, but it will also include provisions on biotech and non-biotech coexistence and a proposal to create a new French biotech committee to assess biotech products at the national level in France.

Includes PSD Changes: No
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Although usually very quiet on the biotech issue, the President stated in his speech that biotech crops provide hopes to feed the world, fight against diseases, increase non-food uses, enhance food quality or lower the uses of products harmful for the environment. Alluding to the recent biotech test plot destructions, Chirac questioned why one should renounce to those benefits.

The Biotech Bill to be presented to the Parliament is expected to include the 2001/18 provisions as well as provisions on the coexistence of biotech and non-biotech crops. Moreover, the proposed legislation would create a biotech committee.

In the European Union, only Denmark and Germany have taken national measures to set clear rules on biotech and non-biotech coexistence. In France, the French Ministry of Agriculture (MinAg) is in charge of the discussion on coexistence measures, especially for corn, because corn would likely be the first biotech crop to be commercially produced in France.

The proposed new biotech committee will be led by the French MinAg, working with the French Ministry of Ecology, and the French Ministry of Research. The biotech committee will include the existing Genetic Engineering Committee ("Commission du Genie Genetique"), the Biomolecular Engineering Committee ("Commission du Genie Biomoleculaire"), the biovigilance committee ("Comite de Biovigilance"). In addition, the project is to include a new committee into the new biotech committee that would discuss the sociological and economical aspects of biotech products.

It is noted that, in mid-October 2004, the French National Assembly created an information Parliamentary work group to review and examine potential environmental and sanitary impacts of the authorizations of biotech test plots. The Chair of the Parliamentary work group is Parliamentarian Jean-Yves Le Deaut (Socialist), organizer of the biotech citizen conference in 1998, and generally favorable to biotechnology.