



Briefing Book

Directorate-General Agriculture
and Rural Development

Background fiches & defensives



Agriculture

**BRIEFING FOR THE
COMMISSIONER-DESIGNATE**

BACKGROUND FICHES

SANTE ISSUES

Key issues at stake

European citizens want to have access to **safe** and **diverse** food of highest standards and the EU food supply chain meets most of these **societal concerns**. The EU is the biggest importer and exporter of food and can therefore set and promote standards worldwide. However, trends in international trade and **ethical aspects** beyond the scientific dimension need constant assessment. In particular, several of our trading partners question the EU SPS measures in several areas, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] OUT OF SCOPE [REDACTED]

[REDACTED], as well as on GMOs and new breeding technologies. The EU similarly has several concerns regarding trading restrictions notably with the US and Asia.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] OUT OF SCOPE [REDACTED]

The EU food policy harmonises standards, reduces and manages risks and therefore, while protecting consumer interests, facilitates the functioning and the development of market and overall economic growth.

- [REDACTED] OUT OF SCOPE [REDACTED]
- Areas affecting the ethical dimension such as [REDACTED] GMOs, new plant breeding technologies, [REDACTED] are particularly critical. Ambiguities and contradictions between economics and ethics must be overcome in the general interest.

[REDACTED] OUT OF SCOPE [REDACTED]

[Redacted]

OUT OF SCOPE

[Redacted]

[Redacted] :

- [Redacted] OUT OF SCOPE
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]

OUT OF SCOPE

[Redacted]

- [Redacted]
- [Redacted] OUT OF SCOPE
- [Redacted]

Link to other policies

- Food law, food and feed safety, animal health and welfare, plant health and plant protection products, use of antimicrobials and resistance to these, new plant breeding techniques, plant reproductive material, and GMOs are all files managed by the Commissioner in charge for the DG SANTE portfolio. However, due to the link to agricultural production they require appropriate follow up and strategic cooperation from the AGRI side.
- [Redacted]

OUT OF SCOPE

OUT OF SCOPE

Background information

Dedicated background for the following clustered issues are in 5 short annexes.

OUT OF SCOPE

5: breeding technologies and GMOs.

Author Unit(s) & Contact Person(s): Unit D2 - Art. 4.1 (b) - privacy

ANNEX 5 TO FICHE ON SANTE ISSUES	DG SANTE: BREEDING TECHNOLOGIES AND GMO
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The European Union strictly regulates the application of the GM technology. The extensive legal framework on **GMOs** (Genetically Modified Organism) aims to:

- protect human and animal health and the environment by introducing a safety assessment of the highest possible standards at EU level before any GMO is placed on the market;
- put in place harmonised procedures for risk assessment and authorisation of GMOs that are efficient, time-limited and transparent;
- ensure clear labelling and traceability of GMOs placed on the market in order to enable consumers as well as professionals to make an informed choice.

GMOs are "organisms in which the genetic material (DNA) has been altered in a way that does not occur naturally by mating and/or natural recombination". Current GM plant species are GM maize, soybean, oilseed rape and cotton varieties with insect/pest resistance and/or herbicide tolerance.

GMOs are a highly controversial topic in the EU. Authorisations are valid throughout the EU and may be for marketing of food and feed uses or for cultivation. Currently, more than 60 GMOs are authorised in the EU for import, food and feed uses while only one GM maize is authorised for cultivation. Usually, Member States are split and vote a 'no opinion' in the PAFF as well as Appeal Committee.

Any GM containing, consisting of, or produced from a GMO has to be labelled, except if the presence is below 0.9% of the food/feed, or is adventitious or technically unavoidable. Animal products from animals fed with GM feed do not require GM-labelling. In the future, the ethical dimension of GMOs may play a bigger role (securing yield vs improving nutritional/health value and environmental behaviour).

NBTs (New Breeding Techniques) consist of a number of scientific methods for the improvement of plants to enhance factors like drought tolerance and pest resistance. They are seen as necessary to meet the challenges of global change. The agri-food industry claims that NBTs should not be considered as GMOs because there is no foreign DNA present in the resulting plants; plants obtained through these techniques could also be the product of conventional crossbreeding techniques. To opponents, NBTs are GMO and all these techniques should fall under the strict GMO approval process.

In 2018, the ECJ ruled that organisms obtained by **mutagenesis technique** are GMOs and should fall under the GMO Directive. Scientists warn about negative consequences for agriculture. The decision could result in a *de facto* ban of precision breeding technique and put Europe's competitiveness at risk.

The Commission's Scientific Advice Mechanism advised **revising the GMO directive** to allow for scientific advances in the field. The GMO Directive exempts some organisms obtained through certain techniques of genetic modification, among which is mutagenesis.

Author Unit(s) & Contact Person(s): AGRI D.2: Art. 4.1 (b) - privacy

GMO (Genetically Modified Organisms) and NBT (New Breeding techniques): Will Europe stay behind?

[[Link to Background Fiche on Sustainability: horizontal issues - Addressing societal concerns on food policy \(ex “SANTE issues”\)](#)]

- While DG SANTE is the lead service for GMO and breeding, I am committed to work closely together with other Commission services to build up more sustainable food systems.
- The EU GMO legislation aims at protecting human health and environment. Authorisations require a science-based case-by-case risk assessment of potential adverse effects for humans, animals and the environment.
- While the legislative framework achieves a high level of safety it is not working as intended and does not meet all of its objectives.
- GMO and NBT plant varieties could benefit citizens and address societal challenges as climate change, sustainable production and healthier diets. The resilience of the EU agri-food systems may also be improved.
- The new Commission needs to decide whether new breeding techniques should be regulated under the current expensive GMO legislation or if a lighter legislative framework is needed.