



Ms Stella Kyriakides
European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety
European Commission

Copy to:

Mr Janusz Wojciechowski, Commissioner for Agriculture;
Mr Virginijus Sinkevičius, Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries;
[REDACTED] [REDACTED] European Food Safety Authority

By electronic mail

Brussels, 7 September 2020

Re: Open-Source Detection Test for First Commercialized Gene-edited Plant Ready for Integration in Routine EU GMO Controls

Dear Commissioner Kyriakides,

We write to inform you about the successful development of a detection test for the first commercialised gene-edited crop – a herbicide-tolerant rapeseed produced by US company Cibus. The undersigned organisations are part of a consortium of NGOs, non-GMO food organisations and the organic food and farming association from Europe, the US and New Zealand that funded this research.

The test¹ shows that it is possible to detect and quantify genetically modified organisms (GMOs) engineered with gene editing, and to distinguish such crops from similar crops developed with other methods.

Importantly, it allows EU authorities to test imports for the presence of this particular GM crop, which is grown in the US and Canada and has no GMO authorisation in the EU. The test thereby supports EU member states in implementing the 2018 ruling of the European Court of Justice (ECJ).²

The detection test is open source and can be used by any regulatory and private laboratory. It meets all EU legal requirements for GMO analytical methods. Its robustness and reliability have been validated by the GMO analysis laboratory of Environment Agency Austria (Umweltbundesamt).

From a scientific perspective, the approach used to develop the test can be employed to develop detection tests for most, if not all, gene-edited crops.

¹ Chhalliyil, P.; Ilves, H.; Kazakov, S.A.; Howard, S.J.; Johnston, B.H.; Fagan, J. [A Real-Time Quantitative PCR Method Specific for Detection and Quantification of the First Commercialized Genome-Edited Plant](#). *Foods* 2020, 9, 1245.

² Ruling of 25 July 2018 in case C-528/16

Commissioner, following the publication of this breakthrough research, we ask you to

- Promote the use of this specific detection method by all EU member states. National inspection bodies should integrate the test into their GMO testing routine in order to identify any illegal presence of this GM crop on the EU market.
- Task the European Network of GMO laboratories (ENGL) to build on this test and develop screening methods to identify further gene-edited GM crops.
- Reflect the findings in the Commission's ongoing study on "new genomic techniques". The successful development of the detection test demonstrates that EU member states' fears that gene-edited products "cannot be distinguished, using current methods, from products resulting from natural mutation" are best addressed through the extension of existing approaches to detection, such as those employed in this case.³

Having provided visibility to the first commercialised gene-edited GM crop, we are confident that analytical capabilities will keep up with developments in GM technology, and that existing EU GMO regulations can be fully applied to gene-edited GM crops as well.

Please could you keep us informed about the steps you are taking to ensure the 2018 ECJ ruling is fully implemented, including testing for presence of illegal gene-edited GMOs. We look forward to your answer and remain at your disposal for any further questions you may have.

Yours sincerely,



  Greenpeace European Unit

Also on behalf of:

ARGE Gentechnik-frei (Austria)

IFOAM Organics Europe

VLOG - Association Food without Genetic Engineering (Germany)

Attached: Media briefing *First open source detection test for a gene-edited GM crop*, 7 September 2020

³ Council Decision (EU) 2019/1904 of 8 November 2019 requesting the Commission to submit a study in light of the Court of Justice's judgment in Case C-528/16 regarding the status of novel genomic techniques under Union law, and a proposal, if appropriate in view of the outcomes of the study