

**HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE ON THE
REGULATION OF GENOME EDITED
PLANTS**

13:30 – 15:00 Session 2: Role and Competitiveness of EU’s R&D
(high-level panel discussion)

1 October 2020

**Representation of the Free State of Bavaria to the EU,
Rue Wiertz 77, 1000 Brussels, Belgium**

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SCENE SETTER

The German Academies of Science and the German Research Foundation (DFG) is organising a high-level conference on the regulation of genome edited plants on 1-2 October 2020. The target audience of the conference includes scientists on GMO related issues, European policy-makers from the Commission, Council and Parliament and policy makers in the Member States, stakeholders from civil society, farmers' associations, plant breeding associations, business etc. About 150-200 participants are expected.

The meeting intends to be an agora for discussing the latest aspects of GMOs in Europe and the world, focussing on prospective EU regulation and on the optimal use of scientific findings in policy design and consumer protection. Additionally, the report commissioned by the German Science Academies and the German Research Foundation will be presented and explained to the audience.

Session 2 on the Role and Competitiveness of EU's R&D (high-level panel discussion) will take place on 1 October between 13:30 – 15:00.

Facilitator: [REDACTED] (requested), Science magazine

- N.N. European Parliament
- Wolfgang Burtscher, Director-General, European Commission Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, Belgium
- Sabine Jülicher, Director, European Commission Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety, Belgium
- [REDACTED], [REDACTED] Euroseeds
- [REDACTED], [REDACTED] Copa & Cogeca European Farmers' Associations, Belgium / Finland
- [REDACTED], VIB-U Gent Centre for Plant Systems Biology, Belgium

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The Commission study on new genomic techniques

KEY MESSAGES

- The EU needs to explore innovative ways to make agriculture more sustainable for the environment and for our societies. As President von der Leyen has indicated in the European Green Deal, new technologies, sustainable solutions and innovation are key to tackling climate and environmental-related challenges.
- This is part of the Farm-to-Fork Strategy, which recognises that new innovative techniques, including biotechnology and the development of bio-based products, may play a role in increasing sustainability, provided they are safe for consumers and the environment while bringing benefits for society as a whole.
- The EU should evaluate transparently and openly the potential contribution of innovative technologies, including gene editing, to a safe, sustainable and resilient agriculture for the environment, farmers and consumers. This is the responsibility of all relevant actors in our society: academia, developers, breeders, farmers, food business operators, NGOs as well as regulators.

BACKGROUND

The European Court of Justice ruling from July 2018 on “new mutagenesis techniques” clarifies that organisms obtained by mutagenesis techniques emerged since the adoption of the Directive on the deliberate release of GMOs (2001/18/EC) do fall within the scope of the Directive. These techniques can alter the genome of a species without the insertion of foreign DNA and in certain cases result in mutations similar to those that can occur in nature.

Several stakeholders (academia, farmers, breeders, industry) consider that these techniques should not be regulated as GMOs and that the GMO framework is not suitable for these products. They also consider that opportunities for innovation will be lost as the GMO legal framework is more complex and burdensome.

Examples of potential benefits, which have been cited include reduced pesticide use, disease resistance, drought tolerance, improved nutritional content, innovation tailored to local needs or for lower profit margin sectors such as horticulture.

Other stakeholders, environmental NGOs in particular, are satisfied with the Court of Justice ruling and want to maintain organisms produced with these techniques, under the GMO legislation, mainly to ensure safety and consumers’ right for information: the GMO legislation includes labelling requirements.

Many of the EU’s trade partners have decided to regulate products of these innovative techniques differently from conventional GMOs or not to regulate them at all basing this decision on the fact that these products could have been also developed through traditional breeding techniques or do not contain foreign genetic material.

In November 2019, the Council adopted a Decision requesting a Commission to deliver a study on the status of certain innovative breeding techniques (“novel genomic techniques”, NGT) by 30 April 2021. The Decision also requests the Commission to submit a proposal (accompanied by an impact assessment), if appropriate in view of the outcomes of the study. This follow up will only be decided once the study is finalised.

The study will deal with:

- A state-of-play on the implementation and enforcement of the GMO legislation, as regards NGTs, based on 1) contributions from targeted consultations of the Member States and stakeholders; 2) work of the European Union Reference Laboratory, together with the European Network of GMO Laboratories, on the detection of products obtained by new mutagenesis techniques.
- Information on the status and use of NGTs in plants, animals and microorganisms for agri-food, industrial and pharmaceutical applications.
- An overview on the risk assessment of plants developed through new genomic techniques, prepared by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), based on its own previous and ongoing work and on work carried out at national level
- An overview of current and future scientific and technological developments in new genomic techniques as well as of new products that are, or are expected to be marketed, prepared by DG Joint Research Centre.
- In addition, the study will take into account an analysis of the ethical and societal implications of gene editing that is being developed by the European Group on Ethics in Science and New Technologies.