

EU effort to end GM crop deadlock meets resistance

July 13 2010, by Christian Spillman



EU commissioner for Health and Consumer Policy John Dalli gives a press conference on the new policy for GMO cultivation at the EU headquarters in Brussels. The European Commission sought Tuesday to end a deadlock blocking the growth of genetically modified crops in Europe, proposing to give countries the freedom to ban the controversial foods.

The European Commission sought Tuesday to end a deadlock blocking the growth of genetically modified crops in Europe, proposing to give countries the freedom to ban the controversial foods.

But the proposal drew immediate protests on both sides of the issue amid deep divisions in Europe over the safety of such food.

"The Commission is not in favour or against GMOs," said European Health Commissioner John Dalli.

"But in today's world, they are a reality and Europe cannot stand idle and deny itself the political responsibility to take decisions and implement a policy of responsible innovation."

Europe has fallen behind the rest of the world amid public concerns over the potential effects of GM crops demonised as "frankenfoods" by opponents.

With governments unable to reach a consensus on the authorisation of new crops, the commission decided to give individual states the power to prohibit or plant such seeds.

Under the proposed rules, once a new GM crop is authorised, governments would be able to ban them across all or part of their territory for socioeconomic, ethical or moral reasons, Dalli said.

But French Environment Minister Jean-Louis Borloo said the proposal was "not acceptable" because it did not address the need to improve the authorisation process.

"They have proposed a swap, that is not going to work," Borloo told AFP.

Dalli denied that the proposed rules were aimed at pressuring some governments to end their opposition to new GM crop applications.

"I don't expect countries to change their voting just because we've put these considerations," he said.

Biotech firms are awaiting clearance for the cultivation of four types of genetically modified maize.

A maize seed developed by US biotech giant Monsanto, MON 810, is

the only crop to have been cleared for commercial cultivation in Europe since 1998.

Six EU states, Austria, Hungary, France, Greece, Germany and Luxembourg, have prohibited MON 810 from their territory but it is grown in Spain, Portugal, the Czech Republic, Romania, Poland and Slovakia.

However, Monsanto's MON 810 was grown on fewer than 95,000 hectares (235,000 acres) of land in the EU last year, down from almost 107,000 hectares in 2008.

A genetically modified potato developed by German group BASF, the Amflora, was given the green light in March but it will only be used for industrial uses for its starch content.

The biotech industry and environmentalist groups slammed the proposal, which has to be adopted by the EU parliament and the European Council.

EuropaBio, which represents the industry in Brussels, said the proposed rules "give carte blanche to ban safe and approved GM crops in any country or region regardless of the needs or wishes of their farmers."

The Green bloc in the European parliament described the proposal as a "dubious bargain" and warning that GM crops posed a contamination threat to other plants.

Green EU lawmaker Martin Haeusling said: "The Commission has not been able to overcome the opposition of the member states to GMOs over the years and wants now to trick them into accepting quicker authorisations."

Opponents of GM food fear they would inevitably contaminate other crops and maintain that is no definitive evidence of their safety.

Supporters argue that such crops have higher yields, resist pests and disease better and require less fertiliser and pesticide. They say farmers should be given the freedom to choose whether they want to plant [GM crops](#).

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