

PRESS RELEASE

NGT PROPOSAL A STEP BACKWARD FOR BIOSAFETY, FREEDOM OF CHOICE AND CONSUMERS' INFORMATION

BRUSSELS, 5 JULY 2023 – IFOAM Organics Europe considers the Commission's proposal to deregulate "New Genomic Techniques" (NGTs) as misguided, dangerous for European seed autonomy, and a distraction from the agroecological solutions needed to move agriculture towards sustainability. The organic movement urges Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and governments to act to protect the freedom of farmers and consumers not to use or buy products from genetic engineering, and to prevent the monopolisation of genetic resources through patents.

Jan Plagge, IFOAM Organics Europe's President, said: "Exempting certain NGTs from risk assessment, traceability and labelling is a step backward for biosafety and consumer information, and is unlikely to bring any benefit for sustainability. Rather, this proposal is a massive accelerator for a lucrative business model from the biotech and chemical industry. It seems that the European Commission unfortunately followed misleading industry promises and their business interests before closing the dangerous loopholes in the patent rights framework. This is a bad day for the European model of a diverse farming and breeding sector. Now, the organic movement calls on the Council and Parliament to at least maintain traceability for NGTs all along the production chain, a legal basis for measures to ensure co-existence, as well as consumers information."

He added: "Consumers want to know how their food is produced, and expect that organic production is done without genetic engineering. In terms of sustainability, organic agriculture has been at the forefront of transitioning our agricultural systems to practices which are good for biodiversity and planetary health. But the success of our movement depends on consumers trust, and traceability and labelling of all GMOs are essential to protect the organic market and the reputation of organic products."

IFOAM Organics Europe regrets that the proposal on genetic engineering does not support an evidence-based and systematic approach to agriculture. It rather seeks to sacrifice the precautionary principle to make way to technological fixes with unproven benefits and potential unintended effects and risks.

While the proposal explicitly prohibits NGTs from organic production – in line with the position of the organic food and farming sector that NGTs should not be used in organic production – it does not provide a clear basis to protect GMO-free and organic production with co-existence measures, nor to ensure a fair distribution of risks and burdens.

Marian Blom, IFOAM Organics Europe's Board Vice President and Knowledge & Innovation Project Leader at Bionext said: "In terms of consumer information and their freedom of choice, the Commission seems to have decided to address citizens' skepticism by either eradicating end-product labelling for Category 1 NGT plants, so that consumers cannot know whether a product contains GMOs or not, or giving the industry the possibility to add voluntary additional information for Category 2 NGT plants. This lack of labelling and reliance on optional statements will decrease transparency, enable greenwashing, and confuse consumers even more."

Dora Drexler, IFOAM Organics Europe's Board Vice President and Managing Director of the Hungarian Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (ÖMKI), warned: "This proposal on NGTs is a threat to the European model of innovation in breeding. NGTs will contribute to monopolising patents on genetic material in the hands of just a few companies. As long as there is no prohibition in EU law of patents on traits and genetic resources that can also be obtained by traditional breeding, traceability is essential to protect breeders and farmers from patents on seeds and to safeguard the possibility for a more systemic and truly sustainable approach to plant breeding."

Bernard Lignon, IFOAM Organics Europe's Board member and Regulations and Organic Product Quality Project Lead at Synabio, added: "The Commission's proposal on "New Genomic Techniques" (NGTs) is a step back from Europe's ambitious environmental goals in the European Green Deal, the Farm to Fork and the EU Biodiversity Strategies. The process leading up to the publication of this proposal was guided by misleading, empty industry promises of sustainability "potential", at the cost of the precautionary principle, biosafety, and transparent information for both producers and consumers."

The proposal comes a few days after the European organic movement [adopted a resolution](#) to keep organic GMO-free in favour of a system-based approach of innovation. In its resolution, the movement re-affirms the demand of organic breeders, farmers, processors, certifiers, traders, and retailers to preserve their freedom of choice to remain GMO-free, including GMOs derived from New Genomic Techniques (NGTs).

The organic movement calls for MEPs and Member States to make sure that principles of risk assessment, traceability, and consumer labelling are applied to all GMOs, including crops derived from gene editing.

Technical details

For 'Category 1 NGT Plants', mandatory traceability along the entire production chain is eradicated and replaced by insufficient provisions for a public registry and seed labelling, which only provide minimal transparency at a breeding and farming level. This fails to deliver real co-existence measures, which depend on mandatory traceability from operator to operator until the end consumer.

The transparency provisions for these crops would place the economic and administrative burden of ensuring GM-free production, including additional identification, controls, and tests, fully on the operators who do not wish to use them, without providing the proper basis to do so.

A further concern is that **for both Category 1 and Category 2 NGT plants, national opt-outs are prohibited**, taking away the possibility for Member States to decide what is cultivated on their territory. Especially for Category 2 NGT plants, where Member States are obliged to come up with national co-existence measures, this is a striking contradiction.

Ends.

Contact details

Eric Gall, Policy Manager and Deputy Director
+32 491 07 25 37, eric.gall@organicseurope.bio
And

Helene Schmutzler, Policy Assistant on GMOs and Organic Textiles
+32 2 416 52 32, helene.schmutzler@organicseurope.bio
And

Eva Berckmans, Communications Manager
+32 2 416 27 62, eva.berckmans@organicseurope.bio
or visit www.organicseurope.bio

Background information

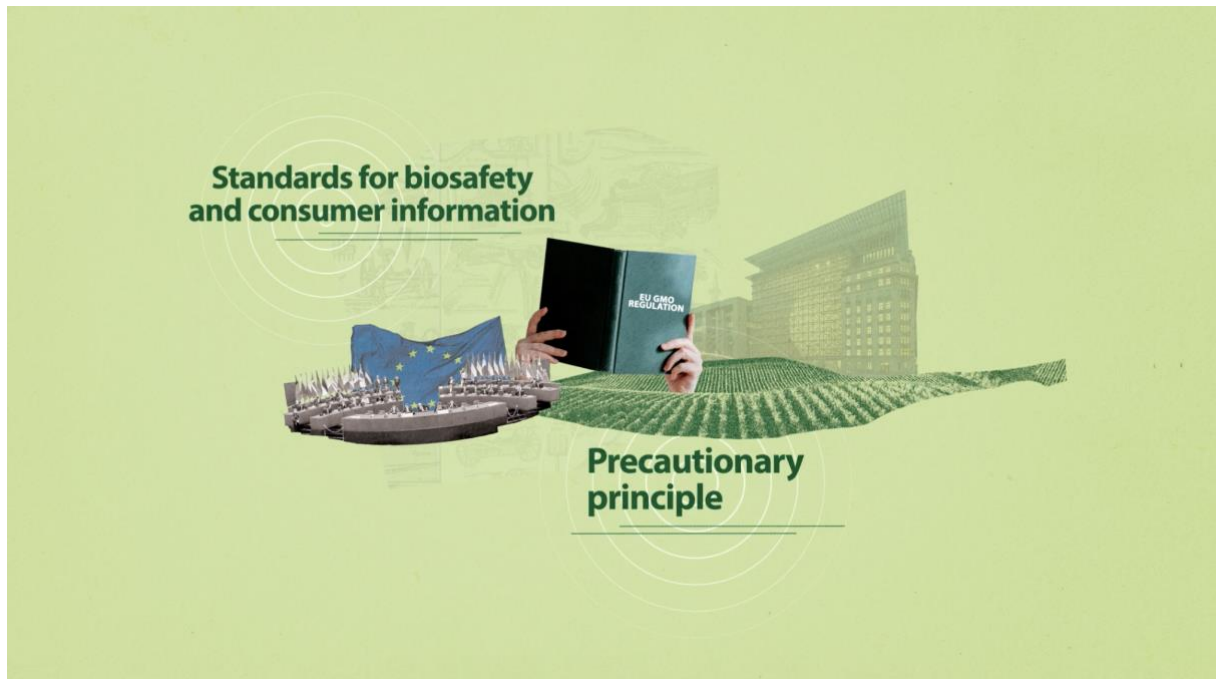
Positions

- [European organic movement's resolution on new GMOs](#)
- Global organic movement position paper on [Compatibility of breeding techniques in organic systems](#)

Other materials

- Watch our video and [learn about the issue with novel genomic techniques](#)

- Read our leaflet and learn why [all techniques of genetic modification must be regulated](#) – available in all European official languages: [\[BG\]](#) [\[CZ\]](#) [\[DA\]](#) [\[DE\]](#) [\[EL\]](#) [\[EN\]](#) [\[ES\]](#) [\[ET\]](#) [\[FI\]](#) [\[FR\]](#) [\[HR\]](#) [\[HU\]](#) [\[IT\]](#) [\[LT\]](#) [\[LV\]](#) [\[MT\]](#) [\[NL\]](#) [\[PL\]](#) [\[PT\]](#) [\[RO\]](#) [\[SK\]](#) [\[SL\]](#) [\[SV\]](#)
- [New GMOs – Key resources](#), living article which is updated periodically
- [Young German organic farmers calling for their right to choose](#) (in German – January 2023)
- [Our webpage on old and new GMOs](#)



What are the issues our food system is facing? How does the industry's empty promises only focus on fixing symptoms instead of the causes of these issues? And why do we need a system-based solution and strong regulation? [Learn more in our new video.](#)

DISCUSSING GMOS FROM SCIENTIFIC, ECONOMIC, AND POLITICAL PERSPECTIVES

GMO-FREE EUROPE EVENT

17 NOVEMBER 2022
10:00-13:00 CET
EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
FREE, REGISTRATION REQUIRED

Organised by:

Hosted by:

Made possible by:

Action financed by:

Watch the [video on the GMO-free Europe event](#). During this event, participants discussed GMOs from the scientific, economic and political perspective.

IFOAM Organics Europe is the European umbrella organisation for organic food and farming. With almost 200 members in 34 European countries, our work spans the entire organic food chain and beyond: from farmers and processors organisations, retailers, certifiers, consultants, traders, and researchers to environmental and consumer advocacy bodies.