



Press release

NGOs welcome today's report from European Economic and Social Committee asking for seed purity in non-GM seed

Brussels, 16 December 2004 -- NGOs and consumer groups welcomed the adoption today by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) of a report on "Co-existence between genetically modified crops, and conventional and organic crops". After the European Parliament requested last year for traces of genetically-modified organisms (GMOs) in non-GM seed to be labelled at the detection level, the EESC has come to the same conclusion, saying that contamination levels of non-GMO seeds by GMOs must be kept at the absolute minimum detection level.

"The EESC has highlighted that it is pointless to talk about coexistence as long as seed purity is not guaranteed," said Aude L'Hirondel of EuroCoop. "The Committee acknowledged that the costs of non-GM and organic products will be much cheaper if the Commission avoids contamination at source."

"The report gives the new European Commission another good reason to break with the policy of its predecessor and to act to protect seeds from contamination by GMOs," said Eric Gall of Greenpeace European Unit.

"The committee took into account that farmers have to deliver the raw material under the official threshold of 0.9% in the final product. Retailers and processors today demand a maximum contamination of 0.1-0.5% for the raw material in order to minimise the risk of further contamination during the production process," said Francis Blake, president of the IFOAM EU Group. "This is well nigh impossible with a seed threshold above the detection limit."

We now call on Commissioners Dimas and Fischer Boel to respect the opinion of these two important policy players, the European Parliament and the EESC, and to come up with a proposal setting thresholds for non-GM seeds at the detection limit.

Significant conclusions that emerge from the report include:

- 1) Contamination levels of non-GMO seeds with GMOs must be kept at the absolute minimum detection level.
- 2) Coexistence will cause substantial additional costs along the entire food production chain. These costs must be borne by those who wish to plant GMOs.
- 3) Under certain botanical (e.g. oilseed rape) and agronomic (small scale farming) conditions, co-existence will clearly be impossible. In these cases growing of GMOs should be prohibited.
- 4) A coherent and EU-wide set of minimum standards of precaution, liability and protection of non-GMO agriculture is required and the report asks the Commission to prepare and propose such legislation.

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Link to EESC report :

http://eescregistry.esc.eu.int/viewdoc.aspx?doc=\\esppub1\esp_public\ces\nat\nat244\en\ces596-2004_fin_as_en.doc