



## To the Members of the EP Committees AGRI and ENVI, and the heads of national delegations

Re: proposed changes to EU rules for GMO cultivation - the Lepage report

19 May 2011

In July you will vote on the Lepage report adopted by the ENVI Committee on 12 April 2011, with proposed amendments to a Commission proposal to allow EU Governments to ban the cultivation of approved genetically modified organisms (GMOs) on grounds other than scientific safety assessment.

The legal concerns about compatibility of the proposal with the Internal Market and the WTO have already been subject of much discussion. However, the organisations of farmers and public researchers listed below urge you to also carefully consider the wider consequences of the proposed changes in European legislation.

As expressed on earlier occasions, the original proposal can have negative consequences for the competitiveness and freedom of choice of U farmers, for science in the EU, and for the EU contribution to food security. The amendments proposed by the Lepage report will make matters even worse, far worse.

### *1. Consequences for the competitiveness and freedom of choice for farmers*

Since 1996, over one billion hectares have been grown with GM crops in over 30 developed and developing countries by over 15 million farmers, most of which small holder farmers. The aggregated data show significant environmental and socio-economic benefits: e.g. yield gains of over 150 million tons (equivalent to 60 million additional hectares of land), pesticide reductions of over 300 million kg of active ingredient, reductions in mycotoxin contamination and substantial reductions of fossil fuel use. It is estimated that with these crops, EU farmers' income would have increased by 443 - 929 M€.

Further, from this period there is not a single verifiable report of adverse effects on human health or the environment caused by GM crops. This was recently confirmed by a Commission report on EU-funded GMO research. These findings are not surprising, because these crops have undergone rigorous scientific safety evaluations. In fact, many of those GM crops can be imported and consumed, but farmers are not allowed to cultivate those same crops, which is very inconsistent.

Banning the cultivation of safety assessed and EU approved GM crops would seriously and unnecessarily affect the competitiveness and freedom of choice of farmers, which in turn will have negative consequences for the internal market. Moreover, even in cases where farmers would have the choice to select the crops they find best suited for their needs, there is always the risk that all of a sudden a ban is put in place as a result of political motivations. Such uncertainty would prevent farmers from taking their decisions on the basis of clear scenarios, which would have grave implications for the agricultural sector.

### *2. Consequences for the scientific potential of the EU.*

Allowing bans or restrictions on the basis of grounds other than scientific safety assessments announces the end of evidence based decision making. Moreover, the proposed amendment 16 of the Lepage report would seriously undermine safety assessments on EU level and the role of EFSA.





All this will also result in great uncertainty whether the results of public sector research will ever reach the farmers. This will discourage scientists to start or continue important research and further exacerbate the brain drain out of Europe to more innovation-friendly parts of the world. In addition, it will reduce the preparedness of European funding agencies to commit funds to long term research projects in modern biotechnology, while R&D efforts in this area in other parts of the world will continue to accelerate.

Finally this devaluation of science will have a negative impact on the research and innovation climate in the EU, far beyond plant biotechnology, such as nanotechnology.

### 3. Consequences for the EU contribution to European and global food security

Limiting the freedom of choice for farmers and discouraging scientific research in agricultural biotechnology in the EU will in fact have much wider consequences. Today over 1 billion people in the world are undernourished, often resulting in chronic diseases and premature deaths. This tragic situation will be compounded in the years to come by population growth and climate change. FAO data show that by 2050 we will have to produce 70% more food and feed, on less land. Mankind will only be able to feed itself without destroying the planet, if farmers can produce more with less impact on the environment, i.e. “sustainable intensification”. Farmers therefore need crops and practices that produce more, that are less dependent on water, pesticides and fertilisers, that can grow on marginal land, that have enhanced nutritional value, etc.

This cannot be solved by conventional approaches alone, but does require the involvement of modern biotechnology. The future of agriculture is not a matter of “either this or that technology” but rather of combining the best available technologies, including conventional, organic and modern biotechnological approaches as well as many other technological innovations, such as information technology.

Over the years, the EU has changed from a major food exporter to a major food importer. If European farmers and scientists are not given the opportunity to help increase and improve production, this will have consequences for the ability of the EU to feed itself and to help increase global food production.

In this light it is difficult to understand the rationale behind banning the cultivation of GM crops on non-scientific grounds in favour of, for example, the economic interests of organic farming, particularly given the accumulated evidence that GM crops can contribute significantly to producing more and better food and feed with less environmental impacts.

The organisations of farmers and public researchers listed below therefore urge you to reject the Lepage report and to reconsider the broader implications of the original Commission proposal in a holistic fashion.

AgroBiotechRom (Romania, [www.agrobiotechrom.ro](http://www.agrobiotechrom.ro)), Asociación Agraria Jóvenes Agricultores (ASAJA, Spain, [www.asajanet.com](http://www.asajanet.com)), Association Française des Biotechnologies Végétales (AFBV, <http://www.biotechnologies-vegetales.com/>), Confagricoltura (Italy, [www.confagricoltura.it](http://www.confagricoltura.it)), Cooperativas Agro-alimentarias (Spain, [www.agro-alimentarias.coop](http://www.agro-alimentarias.coop)), European Confederation of Maize (CEPM, [www.maizeurop.com](http://www.maizeurop.com)), Association of Maize producers (AGPM, France), Association of wheat, maize and oilseed producers (ORAMA, France), FuturAgra (Italy, <http://www.futuraagra.it/>), InnoPlanta (Germany, [www.innoplanta.de/](http://www.innoplanta.de/)), National Farmers Union (UK, [www.nfuonline.com](http://www.nfuonline.com)), National Federation of Agricultural Cooperators and Producers (MOSZ, Hungary, [www.mosz.agrar.hu](http://www.mosz.agrar.hu)), Conservation Agriculture Association (APOSOLO, Portugal, [www.aposolo.pt](http://www.aposolo.pt)), National Farmers' Union of Scotland (NFUS, <http://www.nfus.org.uk/>), Association of Cereal producers (Anpoc, Portugal), Public Research and Regulation Initiative (PRRI, [www.pubresreg.org](http://www.pubresreg.org)).

