



**Pesticide  
Action  
Network**  
Europe

Brussels, 7 December 2023

**Subject: Proposal for a Regulation on plants obtained by certain new genomic techniques and their food and feed**

Dear Minister,

In view of the next Presidency Council meeting on 10-11 December, where the Proposal for a Regulation on plants obtained by new genomic techniques (NGT) and their food and feed will be discussed, we would like to share our deep concerns with you. The current proposal is characterised by significant shortcomings regarding risk assessment, possible impacts on farmers, transparency and rights of producers, retailers, consumers and public authorities.

Overall, **it is essential that all GMOs are subject to robust risk assessment, to adequately assess possible impacts on ecosystems and their functioning, and on human health. This is not the case in the current proposal.** In addition, we specifically want to underline the following aspects:

**1. Herbicide-tolerant and Insect-resistant Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs)**

It is highly problematic that herbicide-tolerant (HT) GMOs would be allowed, as well as even exempted from a robust risk assessment and authorisation and labelling requirements. A leaked version of the Commission's proposal of 15th of June 2022<sup>1</sup> placed HT GMOs under category 2, which would entail that they are subjected to safety assessments regarding human health and the environment. They would also have to be labelled from seed to final product. However, in the version of the Commission's proposal published on the 5th of July 2023<sup>2</sup>, the exclusion of HT GMOs from category 1 was deleted. This would lead to these GMOs being exempt from labelling and risk assessment. As recently documented, the highly problematic change has been inspired by lobby efforts of industry.

HT GMOs are associated with well-known and far-reaching detrimental impacts on the environment, public health and quality of water supplies<sup>3</sup>, for example in the United States,

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<sup>1</sup> European Commission (2023). Draft proposal for a REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL on plants obtained by certain new genomic techniques and their food and feed, and amending Directives 68/193/EEC, 1999/105/EC, 2002/53/EC, 2002/55/EC, and Regulation (EU) 2017/625.  
[https://www.arc2020.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/ARC2020\\_-1.-Draft-NGT-proposal.pdf](https://www.arc2020.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/ARC2020_-1.-Draft-NGT-proposal.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [1] European Commission (2023). Proposal for a REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL on plants obtained by certain new genomic techniques and their food and feed, and amending Regulation (EU) 2017/625. 5 Jul.  
[https://food.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-09/gmo\\_biotech\\_ngt\\_proposal\\_2023-411\\_en.pdf](https://food.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-09/gmo_biotech_ngt_proposal_2023-411_en.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> The Introduction of Thousands of Tonnes of Glyphosate in the food Chain - An Evaluation of Glyphosate Tolerant Soybeans - What the World's Most Controversial Herbicide Is Doing to Rural Argentina - Impacts of genetically engineered crops on pesticide use in the US – The first sixteen years. Environmental Sciences Europe. - Trends in glyphosate herbicide use in the United States and globally. Environmental Sciences Europe - Genetically engineered crops and pesticide use in US maize and soybeans. Science Advances

Latin America and Asia. HT GMOs, namely in maize, cotton and soybean production, have led to an outspoken increase in use of herbicides. For example, between 1995 and 2014 the global use of glyphosate showed an almost 15-fold increase. Intensified use of glyphosate has also led worldwide to glyphosate-resistant weed species, which incentivised a further increase in herbicide use.

Also, insect-resistant GMOs, making up 57% of global GMOs, have been associated with risks for beneficial, non-target organisms, and with increased resistance of pests. For example, specimens of the Western corn rootworm in the US have already developed resistance to several toxins of insect-resistant GMOs, leading to the creation of new-generation GMOs that in turn led to new pest-resistances proving that the pretended advantages of such crops are extremely limited in time, while trapping farmers in a situation of dependence towards seed companies. It is essential that insect-resistant GMOs are subjected to robust risk assessment guaranteeing a high level of protection of health and the environment. For example, the expression of insecticides in pollen, nectar, guttation fluids and soils could have dramatic negative consequences on insects and ecosystems. Hence, the risk assessment should consist of, for mother plants as well as for all following crossings, of concentration measurements in all these mentioned matrices, not only in leaves, stem and roots.

Herbicide-tolerant and insect-resistant GMOs have not led to a decrease in sales of pesticides, or to benefits for ecosystems, farmers and citizens, on the contrary. The NGT proposal has been put forward under the pretext of aiming to increase sustainability, while it would lead to the (unlimited) use of HT GMOs and a lack of robust risk assessment for insect-resistant and other GMOs. It is clear that important lessons need to be drawn from the detrimental impacts of herbicide-tolerant and insect-resistant GMOs in different parts of the world, and that the introduction of these impacts in the EU needs to be avoided. The communication and argumentation around the NGT proposal have been misleading, are characterised by a severe lack of transparency, objectivity and independence and a disregard for the precautionary principle.

## **2. Transparency, labelling and freedom to choose are a prerequisite to respect rights of farmers, retailers, consumers and local/national/regional public authorities**

It is essential that all GMO seeds and products, from all categories, are labelled, and that the right to choose is guaranteed. It is an essential right, and cornerstone of the free market, that producers, retailers, consumers and authorities are informed, and policy makers have the duty to protect this right to choose. There is no valid argument to deprive these different players of these rights. Citizens have expressed repeatedly that they attach great importance to the environmental and health impact of their food, as well as to transparency regarding labelling, as expressed in a 2021 poll and a 2023 petition.

## **3. Need for truly sustainable, resilient food systems and protection of ecosystem functioning**

It is key that the overall, urgent need to transition to truly sustainable, resilient food production systems is central in decision-making, and that regrettable and/or inefficient substitution is avoided. Monocultures with HT GMOs and deregulation of GMOs can not be part of the EU vision for truly sustainable, ecologically responsible and efficient food production systems. GMOs have been associated with decreased genetic diversity and increased monocultural production, leading to further decrease of resilience against pests and climate change. Experience has shown that GMOs can lead to resistance of both plants and pests, often leading to a further increase in pesticide use. Given the development of

resistance, as well as associated risks for the resilience of ecosystems, GMOs can not be regarded as 'the silver bullet' they are often represented to be. It is essential that robust safety assessments, transparency and labelling requirements remain in place, and that cropping practices are based on integrated pest management, optimising healthy ecosystem functioning and fostering truly resilient and hence efficient food production systems.

A group of scientists warned in their joint statement about the shortcomings of the proposal of the Commission, which in its current form cannot ensure health or environmental safety if NGT plants or products derived thereof are released into the environment or placed on the EU market, and therefore ask for the rejection or extensive revision of the proposal.

Citizens expect policy-makers to make independent, science-based, transparent and coherent decisions, and to prioritise health and the environment over the interests of industries. The abolishment of the SUR proposal in the EU Parliament, as well as the attempts to severely water down and delay the proposal in the Council, are in stark contrast with the fast progress on the NGT proposal. For both files, the impact of industry on the decision making progress on the one hand, and the lack of inclusion of citizens' and scientists' demands on the other hand, has been worrying.

Citizens are opposed to the deregulation of NGTs. We therefore ask you to reject the Commission proposal. Deregulation of NGTs is not needed to ensure EU food security and sovereignty, while sufficient scientific and empirical knowledge is available to show that cropping systems based on integrated pest management and enhancement of ecosystem services allow us to face societal and environmental needs.

We respectfully ask you to take into account these important concerns.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration,

Sincerely,

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