

PRESS RELEASE

## Organic food and farming movement asks for immediate action on new genetic engineering techniques

BRUSSELS, 7 NOVEMBER 2019 – Tomorrow, the Council of the European Union is expected to request a new study and a legal proposal on new genetic engineering techniques to the European Commission. IFOAM EU demands immediate action by the European Commission and national authorities to ensure the traceability of new GMOs.

Eric Gall, IFOAM EU Policy Manager explains why: “The legal status of new genetic engineering techniques is crystal clear since the 2018 ruling of the European Court of Justice<sup>1</sup>. The Court deems the European legal framework on GMOs is fit to regulate the new techniques. What we need now is action from the Commission to ensure a proper implementation of the law by Member States and to develop detection methods, not a delay of the enforcement of the legislation”.

The organic movement is concerned that the proposed study could stall the implementation altogether, leaving European farmers, the food industry and consumers exposed to non-approved GMOs. IFOAM EU is against a legal proposal that would exempt the new genetic engineering techniques from the risk assessment, traceability and labelling that apply to GMOs.

As Eric Gall puts it, “any attempt to bypass the Court of Justice’s ruling with a new legal proposal would amount to taking away consumers’ right to know how their food is produced and deprive operators in the food production chain from the means of identifying GMOs.”

According to IFOAM EU, it must be a priority for the EU Commission and national authorities to:

- Subject new genetic engineering techniques to risk assessment, traceability and labelling that apply to GMOs;
- Prioritise that the EU network of GMO laboratories develops methods and strategies to identify unknown genome edited products, based on a clear EU mandate and funding;
- Demand that imports of rapeseed and soybean from the USA and Canada are certified as free from new GMOs that are not authorised in the EU;
- Instruct national food authorities to carry out the necessary controls.

### Background

At the ECOFIN Council on 8 November, ministers are expected to approve a Council Decision<sup>2</sup>. This decision requests the Commission “to submit a study on the Union's options for addressing the legal situation of 'novel genomic techniques’”. This study will be “followed up by a [legislative] proposal if appropriate in view of the outcomes of the study”.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://curia.europa.eu/jcms/upload/docs/application/pdf/2018-07/cp180111en.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-12781-2019-INIT/en/pdf>

The ruling from the European Court of Justice of July 2018 clarified that all GMOs, old and new, are subject to the EU's obligations for risk assessment, authorisation, traceability and labelling. According to IFOAM EU, this is essential since the genetic engineering process can lead to unexpected outcomes that are not detected by the internal controls of the biotechnology industry, as a recent example of "genome edited" cattle has shown.<sup>3</sup> Subjecting new genetic engineering techniques to the same rules as GMOs is also the only way to safeguard traceability and transparency for breeders, farmers, food and feed producers, traders, retailers and consumers, from organic or conventional production alike.

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IFOAM EU represents more than 210 member organisations in the EU-28, the EU accession countries and EFTA. Member organisations span the entire organic food chain and beyond: from farmers and processors organisations, retailers, certifiers, consultants, traders and researchers to environmental and consumer advocacy bodies