



Members of the European Parliament  
Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety

**Vote on draft report of Corinne Lepage, 12 April  
Freedom of choice depends on GMO free seed**

Brussels, 11<sup>th</sup> April 2011

Honoured Member of the European Parliament,

The signing organisations follow with concern the discussions on labelling thresholds for the presence of GMOs in GMO-free seed related to the draft report of MEP Corinne Lepage in the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety. This report amends the Commission proposal to create a possibility for the Member States to restrict or prohibit the cultivation of GMOs in their territory.

**GMO - free seed is a pre-condition to guarantee GMO-free agriculture in the future** and therewith the economic viability of the whole GMO-free food supply chain, including European plant breeders, seed producers, farmers, gardeners, beekeepers, farm workers and operators through the whole food supply chain. **The prevention of the presence of GMOs in GMO-free seed is of great importance and requires an extended discussion on its own within the European Parliament, taking into consideration stakeholder opinions.** Therefore it is **inappropriate to put the essential seed issue on the side line of this report**, which actually discusses the possibility of member states banning the cultivation on their territory.

However, several amendments raise the issue of thresholds for labelling GMO traces in seed in this report. The proposals leave out the main objective which must be to maintain GMO-free seeds as the source for our food sector. Moreover the wording is partly taken from the Council Conclusions<sup>1</sup> of Environmental Ministers from 4 December 2008, but the amendments do not stick to the full wording of the Council's conclusions, and do no longer refer to the "adventitious presence" of GMOs in GMO-free seed as the Council does, but to traces of GMOs in general, being intended or unintended, and therefore opens the door to lax approaches towards seed purity.

**Therefore, we call on you**

**to vote against:**

**Amendments 40 (last sentence), 112, 113, AGRI 7 and AGRI 17**

## **Justification:**

### **Consumers want to exert their right to choose on GMO free food**

The majority of EU consumers want GMO free food<sup>ii</sup>. The consumers' right-to-choose must be guaranteed in the future: Conventional GMO-free and organic food products must be available.

### **Socio-economic impacts on the food supply chain**

Our members and supporters, amongst them many plant breeders, seed producers, farmers, gardeners, beekeepers, farm workers, consumer co-operatives and other operators through the whole food supply chain, rely on the certainty that seeds which are not labelled as containing GMO are guaranteed GMO free in order to supply consumers with a true GMO-free choice. All these businesses along the food chain deliver to market segments that pay only for GMO free food and their economic existence therefore depends on GMO free seed amongst others.

GMO free production is nowadays threatened by GMO contamination at different levels of the food supply chain, through pollination on the field as well as through common use of transport, drying, storage and processing facilities. The current EU legal framework does not sufficiently address this problem. The contamination with GMOs can eliminate employment and have devastating effects on local economies, as it makes a proper traditional or organic agriculture impossible.

### **Food production starts with seed**

As a pre-condition to enable the food sector to further on deliver GMO free food, secured access to GMO-free seed in the future must be guaranteed, also in order to accomplish the EU 2020-objectives regarding economic performance and employment in the food sector.

Cases of GMO contamination in seed have already occurred in many countries, always with devastating economic impacts for the concerned operators<sup>iii</sup>. These occurrences must not become routine. The acceptance of GMO contamination in seed would jeopardise the legal requirement for the traceability of GMOs and make the withdrawal of a specific GMO from the market and the environment impossible. The possibility to withdraw a GM crop is necessary in the eventuality that new scientific evidence shows unexpected threats to human health and/or the environment

### **Purity standards in seed production**

The seed sector has, for many years, been working with the highest purity standards regarding admixtures of other varieties, species or weed seeds. At an overall economic level the avoidance of GMO contamination in the seed sector is thus feasible at a comparably low price. This is measured against the heavy distortion that would be caused throughout the food chain if GMO contamination could enter the food chain unrecognised already at the seed level<sup>iv</sup>.

### **Our key demands:**

- The signing organisations ask you to ensure that seed purity will be maintained and upcoming legislative initiatives do not allow for contamination of non-GM crops with GMOs. Therefore, any (also unintended) unlabelled presence of GMO in non-GM-seed must be prevented. Please **vote against** amendments **40** (last sentence), **112**, **113**, **AGRI 7** and **AGRI 17** on the Lepage report.
- The polluter pays principle must be ensured in the legal framework concerning GMOs. The burden of costs that result from the prevention of GMO contamination must not be shouldered by GMO-free food, feed and seed producers. Those companies that place GMO on the market must be made liable for the resulting costs for the GMO-free sector.
- Specific legal measures to protect seed production from GMO contamination must be introduced with the general revision of GMO legislation in 2012.

The signing organisations would be pleased to have an opportunity to discuss this issue with you and believe the discussion of appropriate measures to prevent the presence of GMO in seed should include a broad range of stakeholders – such as consumers, farmers, trade unions, food producers, consumer co-operatives, retailers, breeders and seed producers of different scales and product ranges, as well as environmental organisations.

We thank you for your consideration of this letter and we hope that you will take up our proposals in your vote on the 12<sup>th</sup> of April,

Yours sincerely,

**Miguel López**, Secretary General of COAG

**Rodrigo Gouveia**, Secretary General of Euro Coop

**Arnd Spahn**, Sectoral Secretary for the Agriculture sector, EFFAT

**Walter Haefeker**, President of EPBA

**Josie Riffaud**, Member of the Coordination's Committee of ECVC

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## References:

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<sup>i</sup> **Council Conclusions** on Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs); 2912th E□VIRO□ME□T Council meeting; Brussels, 4 December 2008:

[http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressdata/en/envir/104509.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/envir/104509.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> **European Commission:** Europeans and Biotechnology in 2010:

[http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_341\\_winds\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_341_winds_en.pdf)

<sup>iii</sup> E.g. Bello, A., Porcuna, J. L.; González, V1.; Fabeiro, C. 2007: Organic farming integrity in maize cultivation in Spain ([http://www.agroecologia.net/recursos/posicionamientos/transgenicos/034-Bello-Organic\\_as1.pdf](http://www.agroecologia.net/recursos/posicionamientos/transgenicos/034-Bello-Organic_as1.pdf)); and: Antje Lorch and Christoph Then, 2009 Schadensbericht Gentechnik, BÖLW ([http://www.boelw.de/uploads/media/BOELW\\_Schadensbericht\\_Gentechnik090318.pdf](http://www.boelw.de/uploads/media/BOELW_Schadensbericht_Gentechnik090318.pdf));

<sup>iv</sup> Cf. ***Economic impacts of labelling thresholds*** for the adventitious presence of genetically engineered organisms in conventional and organic seed; Study by Christoph Then and Matthias Stolze, IFOAM EU Group 2009 [www.ifoam-eu.org/positions/publications/pdf/IFOAMEU\\_GMO-freeSeedStudy.pdf](http://www.ifoam-eu.org/positions/publications/pdf/IFOAMEU_GMO-freeSeedStudy.pdf)

And *Schadensbericht Gentechnik*, Antje Lorch and Christoph Then, BÖLW, 2009 [www.boelw.de/uploads/media/BOELW\\_Schadensbericht\\_Gentechnik090318.pdf](http://www.boelw.de/uploads/media/BOELW_Schadensbericht_Gentechnik090318.pdf)

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## Annex: Amendments

Concerning the unintended presence of GMO traces in GMO free seed, the Committee on Environment, Health and Consumer protection will have to vote on the following proposals:

(Full list:

[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009\\_2014/documents/envi/am/861/861210/861210en.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/envi/am/861/861210/861210en.pdf))

### **Amendment 40, last sentence:**

Catherine Soullie, Françoise Grossetête, Pilar Ayuso, Horst Schnellhardt, Julie Girling, Elisabetta Gardini, Sergio Berlato

***“The Commission should assess the need for the establishment of thresholds for labelling GMO traces in conventional seeds at the lowest practicable, proportionate and functional levels for all economic operators.”***

### **Amendment 112**

Renate Sommer

***(1a) The following Article shall be inserted:***

***“Article 26 ba***

***Seed thresholds***

***The Commission shall establish thresholds for labelling GMO traces in conventional seeds at the lowest practicable, proportionate and functional levels for all economic operators.”***

### **Amendment 113**

Christofer Fjellner

***(1a) The following Article shall be inserted:***

***‘Article 26 ba***

***Seed thresholds***

***The Commission shall assess the need for the establishment of thresholds for labelling GMO traces in conventional seeds at the lowest practicable, proportionate and functional levels for all economic operators. It shall submit a report to the European Parliament and to the Council by 31 December 2012, accompanied, if appropriate, by relevant legislative proposals.’***

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Additionally, the Committee on Environment, Health and Consumer protection will have to vote on the opinion the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development submitted; the following two amendments concerning seed purity:

(full list:

[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009\\_2014/documents/agri/ad/858/858438/858438en.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/agri/ad/858/858438/858438en.pdf))

### **Amendment AGRI 7**

**Proposal for a regulation – amending act**

Recital 9a(new)

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***(9a) In line with the Environmental Council Conclusions of 4 December 2008, and in order to ensure respect for the freedom of choice and full implementation of the principle of proportionality, the Commission should re-evaluate the appropriate seed thresholds level for labelling GMO traces in conventional seeds. This should be accompanied by relevant proposals on harmonised sampling and analysis methods for those traces, in particular the setting up of a minimum performance limit for detection methods.***

**Amendment AGRI 17**

**Proposal for a regulation – amending act**

**Article 1 - point 1**

Directive 2001/18/EC

Article 26 b – paragraph 2 a (new)

***The Commission shall assess the need for harmonisation of the sampling and analysis methods for non-authorised GMOs present at a low level in seed, and in particular for the setting of a minimum performance limit for detection methods.***

*Justification: The lack of harmonisation leads the Member States to apply different rules, which inevitably introduce distortions of competition, since firms are able to adjust their marketing channels. Since traces of non-authorised GMOs in batches of imported seeds are frequently found in spite of the measures taken by operators, the same procedure should be envisaged as is proposed by the Commission for animal feed.*