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Retailers' Resolution

European Retailers Take a Strong Stand Against Deregulating New GMOs

In July 2018 the European Court of Justice (ECJ) ruled that all products stemming from the new genetic engineering methods, such as CRISPR/Cas, TALENs and others, must be classified as GMOs, in the same manner as previous GMOs. Thus, both new and old GMOs come under the same EU GMO legislation. Therefore, products made using the new genetic engineering methods are also subject to the precautionary principle and transparency requirements. They must undergo environmental and food safety risk assessments before receiving permission to enter the EU market. Their producers must provide detection methods, economic operators must ensure traceability throughout the entire value chain, and authorities are responsible for effective monitoring methods.

The current EU GMO legislation has proven its worth. GMOs receive EU market authorization, and, in general, consumers have freedom of choice due to GMO labelling. Where this freedom of choice is not provided due to the labelling gap within the EU GMO legislation – i.e., for products of animal origin, such as milk, meat and eggs derived from GM feed, which need not be labelled as GMO products – non-GMO labelling is available. A non-GMO label precludes GM feed in the animal's diet. The significant increase in non-GMO products in supermarkets throughout Europe in recent years shows how transparency conforms to consumer preferences and demand.

If the lobbying initiatives to lower these well accepted and widely established standards and laws for new GMOs – or even to fully deregulate new GMOs – succeed, we as retailers – as the player along the supply chain with the closest proximity to the end consumers and, thus, most knowledgeable about the wishes and expectations of our customers – would see our credibility, quality management systems throughout the value chain and commitment to transparency placed at risk.

Deregulation would mean that products made using the new genetic engineering processes would come on the market untested and unlabelled. Our expanding organic and conventional non-GMO product lines would be under particular threat of damage or destruction. A conventional non-GMO label must deliver what it promises and reliably exclude both old and new GMOs. The organic sector would be equally affected: The ban on GMOs, which is clearly laid down in the EU Organic Regulation, is an important selling point for organic products, and would be at risk if new GMOs are deregulated. The expansion of organic farming in Europe, envisioned in the EU Commission's Green Deal, would also be jeopardized to a massive extent.

If the existing standards were lowered for new GMOs, we would run the risk of selling untested and unlabelled GMOs – both in plant-based foods and in foods of animal origin. This is unacceptable to us!

- As retailers we are fully responsible and liable for the safety of all the products we sell.
- For us as retailers one of our key values is full transparency and freedom of choice for our customers in all our product segments.
- As retailers we must be highly sensitive to the social, behavioral and food-related patterns of our customers: Throughout Europe reports show that a substantial majority of consumers have no demand whatsoever for GMOs in their food – not in plants and vegetables or in products of animal origin, such as milk, meat and eggs, or in any other product segment.

The current EU GMO legislation effectively allows to keep GMOs out of the food-and-feed-production value chains and thus enables consumers to consciously avoid GMOs in their food.

As representatives of key European retailers we insist that the existing EU GMO legislation – with the precautionary principle and transparency requirements as its central pillars – continue to be applied to new GMOs. New GMOs must continue to be regulated in the same manner as old GMOs. Any other outcome from the political and scientific discussions currently underway would seriously undermine our own businesses, as well as the businesses of many farmers and seed, feed and food producers, especially in the highly-successful organic sector.

In addition, we have serious doubts that the ambitious and promising European Green Deal is compatible with the deregulation of new GMOs. Deregulating new GMOs and strengthening the EU food system to achieve greater sustainability are incompatible goals.





Signatories in alphabetical order, as of 26 May 2021:

ALDI Hungary, ALDI Italy, ALDI NORD Germany, ALDI SUED Germany, ALDI Suisse, Alnatura Germany, BioMarkt Verbund Germany, BNN Germany, Dennree GmbH Germany, Denn's Biomarkt GmbH Germany, Handelsverband Österreich Austria, HOFER KG Austria, HOFER Slovenia, IGBM e.V. (Interessengemeinschaft BioMarkt e.V.) Germany, Lidl Dienstleistung GmbH & Co. KG Germany, Lidl Österreich GmbH Austria, Naturata Luxemburg, METRO Cash & Carry Österreich GmbH Austria, MPREIS Warenvertriebs GmbH Austria, Rewe Group Austria (incl. Billa and Penny), SPAR Österreichische Warenhandel GmbH Austria, Synadis bio France, Tegut Germany, TOP-TEAM Zentraleinkauf GmbH Austria, Transgourmet Österreich GmbH Austria, Unimarkt Gruppe (Unimarkt, Pfeiffer Großhandel, Nah & frisch) Austria

The Retailers' Resolution is open for further supporters. Please contact us:

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