

MEDIA ADVISORY

GMO “opt out” proposal: Governments must be allowed to protect their own national interests

Brussels, 2 December 2014 – Before the last round of trilogue negotiations between the Council and the Parliament on the GMO “opt out” directive tomorrow 3 December, the organic farming movement urges Member States to take on board the Parliament’s demand for clear, sound legal grounds to ban GMOs.

“If Member States believe that asking biotech companies not to market their products is a safer way than banning them on clear legal grounds, they are wrong. The Parliament should not accept this quick-fix solution that amounts to sweeping the GM problem under the carpet and that will only create more confusion in the long-term,” warned Marco Schlüter, IFOAM EU Director.

“These negotiations should be about finding the right tools and processes for Member States to make informed decisions on GMOs after an open and transparent discussion on the relevance and impact of GMOs on their agricultural systems, taking into account the economic burden that GMO cultivation will create for organic and conventional farming,” continued Schlüter. “Member States must be allowed to make their own decisions based on solid legal grounds and not be subjected to the will of corporate parties.”

“European farmers who want to serve their own market where consumers don’t want to purchase food containing GMOs will be among the big losers. The best and cheapest way to protect organic and non-GM farming from GMO contamination is to ban GMO cultivation,” said Eric Gall, IFOAM EU Policy Manager. “But if a Member State decides to allow GMO cultivation, it should be obliged to adopt rules that protect conventional and organic farmers from contamination and compensate them in case they lose their markets or their organic certification.”

Background – The trilogue discussions aim to reach consensus on the procedure for Member States to restrict cultivation of GMOs. In the Council proposal, Member States would have to ask the company applying for permission to market a GMO to withdraw their territory from the scope of their application (phase 1). If the applicant does not agree, Member States are given a list of considerations to justify their demand. However, the considerations specified in the Council proposal do not provide sufficient legal ground to enact a ban (phase 2). In practice, it could mean that corporate interests rather than democratic institutions will decide where GMOs are cultivated in Europe. On the other hand, the Parliament position would enable EU countries to adopt bans using grounds related to environmental impacts and risks complementary to those concretely examined during the EU risk assessment. Such risk management measures are not in contradiction with the EU risk assessment, which does not address all the systemic impacts of GMOs in the diverse European agricultural systems. When deciding whether to restrict GM cultivation or not, governments would act as risk managers, taking into account the European Food Safety Authority’s assessment, as well as other relevant economic, environmental and agricultural considerations – allowing Member States to decide for themselves.

For more information please contact:

Eric Gall, IFOAM EU Policy Manager, +32 (0) 491 07 25 37

IFOAM EU represents more than 160 member organizations in the EU-28, the EU accession countries and EFTA. Member organizations 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