

German Parliament amends biotechnology law

(February 01, 2008) The German Parliament, the Bundestag, has adopted a new set of rules for the labelling of "GMO free" animal products and the cultivation of genetically modified maize. Food from animals like meat, milk and eggs can be labelled as "without gene technology" ("ohne Gentechnik") as long as their feed contained no genetically modified plants. They may well have been fed with additives like vitamins, enzymes or amino acids that were produced with genetically modified organisms, if alternative additives that have not come into contact with genetic engineering are not on the market. The label "without gene technology" can be used on a voluntary basis. The Federal Minister of Food, Agriculture and Consumer Protection, Horst Seehofer, affirmed his call for a revision of the EU authorisation procedure for biotechnology products. Seehofer called for an exclusively scientific approval process without the chance of any politically influenced decisions. He named the EU drug approval process as a role model.

To protect conventional and organic maize from cross-pollination, the Bundestag introduced a minimum distance of 150 meters between GM maize and conventional maize fields, and 300 meters between GM maize and organic maize fields. Farmers who want to cultivate genetically engineered maize must advise their neighbours in writing three months before the intended sowing. They can mutually agree to stay below the minimum distance. Any such agreement has to be reported towards the competent federal authority and will be recorded in the nationwide site register. According to the public register, around 250 German farmers currently plan to seed more than 3.600 hectares of genetically modified maize in 2008.

The German Farmers Association (DBV) and the food industry disqualified the new labelling rules and called them a deceptive package. By contrast, consumer and environmental groups applauded the GMO free labelling as a step to offer consumers the freedom of choice between genetically modified and other animal products. On the other hand, they criticized the rules for a good agricultural practice as too slack. The upper house, the Bundesrat, will decide on the amendments in its next meeting on the 15th of February. It cannot block the law, but it can ask for a conciliation procedure. Ultimately, the Bundestag can override any objection by the Bundesrat.

Further information:

- [Q&A: Amendments in the German biotechnology law \(in German\)](#)