EUROPEAN COMMISSION
HEALTH AND CONSUMERS DIRECTORATE-GENERAL

Safety of the Food Chain
Biotechnology

Brussels,
SANCO/E1/TB/oz sanco.ddg2.e.1(2013)3888664

Dear Madam, Dear Sir,

Subject: Foodwatch online action for clear and uniform labelling of genetic engineering

I thank you for the petition sent to Commissioners Borg and Ciolos related to labelling of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs). Commissioners Borg and Ciolos have asked me to reply on their behalf.

First of all, the Commission reminds the petitioners that the GMO legislation (Directive 2001/18/EC[1] and Regulation (EC) No 1829/2003[2]) sets that GMOs can be authorised in the EU only after having successfully been through a stringent risk assessment process guarantying that they are safe for human and animal health and for the environment.

The Commission considers it necessary to properly inform the consumers on the presence of authorised GMOs in foodstuffs and feed, allowing them to make an informed purchasing choice. The GMO legislation ensures that consumers are comprehensively informed on the presence of GMOs in food and feed. An exception applies only when food and feed contain GMOs in a proportion not higher than 0,9% of the food or feed ingredient considered individually, provided that this presence is adventitious or technically unavoidable.

Recital 16 of Regulation (EC) No 1829/2003 provides that authorisation and labelling requirements do not apply to products obtained from animals fed with GMOs, such as eggs, meat or dairy products. Indeed the determining factor to decide if a product falls under its scope is whether or not material derived from the GM source material is present in the food, and this is not the case for the above mentioned products. This was confirmed by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) on 19 July 2007, which published a statement[3], after thorough analysis of the existing scientific evidence, concluding that:

- Biologically active genes and proteins are common constituents of food and feed in varying amounts. After ingestion, a rapid degradation into short DNA or peptide fragments is observed in the gastrointestinal tract of animals.

[1] OJ L 106, 17.4.2001

[2] OJ L 268, 18.10.2003

[3] http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/efsajournal/doc/744.pdf

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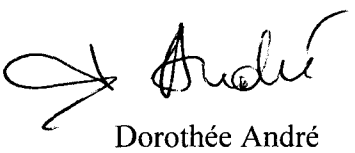
- To date, a large number of experimental studies with livestock have shown that recombinant DNA fragments or proteins derived from GM plants have not been detected in tissues, fluids or edible products of farm animals like broilers, cattle, pigs or quails.

Having said that, the EU legislation does not prevent the use of "GM-free" labels signalling that foodstuffs do not contain GM crops, or were not produced using GMOs, provided that they respect the general rules on food labelling. Such labels are being developed in several Member States and the Commission has launched a study to gain a better understanding of the scopes and specifications of these labels in the EU, and to assess the need for a possible harmonisation of this field. The results of the study will be published soon, and will serve as a basis for an open discussion on the matter with Member States and stakeholders.

I hope the elements above will reassure the petitioners about the commitment of the Commission to address their concerns, within the limits of the EU legislation adopted by the European Parliament and the Member States.

Yours sincerely,



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