EUROPEAN COMMISSION

HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY DIRECTORATE-GENERAL

SUMMARY REPORT

JOINT WORKING GROUP

of the Standing Committee on Plants, Animals, Food and Feed
Section Genetically Modified Food and Feed,
Regulatory Committee under Directive 2001/18/EC and
Regulatory Committee under Directive 2009/41/EC

on new genomic techniques

Videoconference, 7 May 2021

Chair: Commission (DG SANTE /E3)
MS present: BE, BG, CZ, DK, DE, EE, IE, EL, ES, FR, HR, IT, CY, LV, LT, LU, HU, MT, NL, AT, PL, PT, RO, SK, SI, FI, SE
Others: DG JRC/EURL, DG RTD, EFSA, EGE, Mission of NO

The Commission welcomed the participants of the Joint Working Group of GMO competent authorities and explained that the objective of the meeting was 1) to present the Commission study on the status of new genomic techniques (NGTs), which was submitted to the Council on 29 April 2021; and 2) to exchange views at technical level on the study conclusions and the possible policy action the Commission had announced to the Council on the same day.

The Commission presented the study on NGTs, including background, methodology, main findings and conclusions. The Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC) and the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) presented their scientific contributions, namely the technological and market landscape reviews and the overview of EFSA and MS authorities' safety opinions. The European Group on Ethics in Science and New Technologies (EGE) presented its recent opinion on the ethics of gene editing.

The Commission presented also the next steps on the intended targeted policy action for plants produced by targeted mutagenesis and cisgenesis. The Commission explained that the policy options and timeline have not been defined yet, because the Commission intends first to gather the views of the Member States, the European Parliament and stakeholders. The initiative will take into account the parallel work on sustainability of the food system to ensure policy coherence.

A round of comments and questions from the Member States followed up the presentations. 11 Member States took the floor to ask questions mainly on next steps, noting that their views were preliminary and still under internal discussion. The Member States that took the floor

expressed their interest to cooperate with the Commission on next steps. Two Member States stated that they would be willing to share ideas on policy options, once internal discussions are more advanced.

Several Member States thanked the Commission for the study, which they found comprehensive, complete and useful. The following topics were mentioned as key regarding the future policy action:

- How to ensure the precautionary principle as well as proportionality in risk assessment;
- How to ensure safety while allowing development of products beneficial to society and to the Green Deal/Farm to Fork sustainable food system objectives;
- How to address the implementation challenges in the detection and differentiation of certain NGT products;
- How to ensure consumers' awareness and right to information;
- How to define the criteria that plants should meet to be included in the proposal;
- How to ensure coexistence with other types of agriculture;
- How to address remaining legal uncertainties.

One Member State mentioned that action should be considered for microorganisms as well. Another Member State asked about the link with the Pharmaceutical Strategy.

In its closing remarks, the Commission concluded that the meeting showed that the study had achieved its objective of providing detailed information on NGTs, and was a robust basis for discussing possible future action, acknowledging that open questions will be addressed in the impact assessment. The aim is not to deregulate NGT products, but to deliver a policy that maintains a high level of protection of human and animal health and the environment and allows reaping benefits from innovation.

The support of EFSA, EU Reference Laboratory on genetically modified food and feed (EURL) and European Network of GM Laboratories (ENGL) will be needed to continue building the scientific basis in the areas of microorganisms and animals. In this context, Member States technical expertise to support the work done at EU-level will be important.

The specificities of medicinal products will be considered in the Pharmaceutical Strategy.

Finally, the Commission recalled that Member States needed to continue to ensure that the GMO legislation is implemented at national level as interpreted by the Court of Justice of the European Union. The Commission also confirmed that the EURL and ENGL continue holding regular discussions on the challenges and possibilities to detect and identify NGT products.

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