

Brussels, 10 December 2002

Margot Wallström welcomes agreement on traceability and labelling of genetically modified organisms (GMOs)

European Environment Commissioner Margot Wallström welcomed yesterday's agreement on a common position for a Regulation on traceability and labelling of GMOs and traceability of food and feed products produced from GMOs. Commissioner Wallström said : "The people of Europe want to be fully informed about the use of GMOs in food, feed and agricultural production. It is our responsibility as policy makers to show strong political leadership and do what is necessary to ensure a high level of environmental protection as well as safety and consumer choice. This is essential if Europe is to reap the potential benefits of GMOs and biotechnology."

The Commissioner added : "If we are to make acceptance of GMO products possible in the European Union then we must restore public and market confidence. In order to do so, we must provide consumers with an effective choice between GMO and non-GMO products. Labelling and traceability of GMO products will enable them to choose".

Directive 2001/18/EC on the deliberate release into the environment of GMOs was fully applicable on 17 October 2002. The Directive provides the foundation for approval of new GMOs under a more stringent, efficient and transparent authorisation procedure and requires Member States to ensure labelling and traceability.

Agreement today means that these national measures will be replaced by common measures throughout the EU under this proposal when it takes effect.

The text agreed on last night includes that:

Products containing GMOs that are to be made available to consumers will always have to be labelled as such.

When operators, throughout the production and distribution chains, are handling products that contain GMOs they will have to provide this information to the next operator in the chain providing for traceability.

Operators will have to list the codes for individual GMOs, in accompanying documentation, that have been used to constitute the original raw material for products intended for food, feed and processing.

The accidental presence of minute traces of GMOs in products for food, feed and processing is addressed using coherent and consistent thresholds.

A clause to ensure that the Regulation meets its objectives and is operational and enforceable.

