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Commission proposals for a trustworthy and environmentally safe approach to GMOs and GM food and feed backed by European Parliament

The European Parliament completed today its first reading on two Commission proposals on genetically modified organisms (GMOs) which establishes a sound Community system to trace and label GMOs and to regulate the placing on the market and labelling of food and feed products derived from GMOs. The new legislation is intended to further facilitate a trustworthy and environmentally safe approach to GMOs, GM food and GM feed and to ensure consumer choice through comprehensive labelling. The legislative package consists of a proposal¹ for traceability and labelling of GMOs and products produced from GMOs and a proposal² on regulating GM food and feed. It will require the traceability of GMOs throughout the chain from farm to table and provide consumers with information by labelling all food and feed consisting of, containing or produced from a GMO.

The European Parliament broadly supported the two proposals adopting a large number of amendments to the legislative package. The majority of amendments do not alter the general thrust of the Commission proposals. The Commission is pleased that Parliament rejected the more extreme amendments which would have required, for example, compulsory labelling of meat, milk and eggs obtained from animals fed on GM feed. This would not be workable in practice. Moreover, Parliament supported the Commission's proposals to require the labelling of all GM food and feed irrespective of the presence of transgenic DNA or protein. This will guarantee freedom of choice for consumers. However, the Commission is holding a firm line in rejecting those amendments which would put significant obstacles in the way of the practical implementation of the legislation and hamper international trade. In particular, the Commission cannot accept the amendment which would rule out tolerance of minute traces of unauthorised but scientifically positively assessed GM material. The same applies to an amendment which would require the precise identification (through a unique code) of GMOs which are not to be disseminated into the environment. These amendments would represent a high cost for the operators without providing significant benefits in terms of risk management.

¹ Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning traceability and labelling of genetically modified organisms and traceability of food and feed products produced from genetically modified organisms.

² Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on genetically modified food and feed.

Commissioners Wallström and Byrne welcome the completion of the first reading by the European Parliament.

Commissioner David Byrne said "I want all GM food and feed labelled and I am pleased to see the Parliament supporting my approach. Moreover, the comprehensive labelling will allow consumers to decide if they want to buy food produced from GMOs. The two proposals together strike a good and balanced compromise between differing views. I firmly believe that they also provide the right approach to foster public confidence and social acceptance of the application of biotechnology in agri-food production. They will also give legal certainty for business operators as well as facilitating trade"

Environment Commissioner Margot Wallström said: «By ensuring that GMOs can be traced at all stages in the production and marketing chain, we provide a robust safeguard system and the foundation for a comprehensive labelling system. In this way, we address some of the most critical concerns of the public regarding the environmental and health effects of GMOs and enable consumers to chose. I believe our proposals will build public confidence in new technologies. This in turn will facilitate business development and international trade »

The report of the European Parliament will now be transmitted to the Council. It is expected that the Council will adopt its Common Position this autumn.