

## **TRACEABILITY AND LABELLING OF GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS**

The Council held a policy debate, transmitted live to representatives of the press and interested members of the public, on the proposal for a Regulation establishing a system of traceability and labelling of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and of food and feed products produced from GMOs.

During the debate Ministers replied to three questions, the first of which concerned the scope of the proposal. The second question related to the type of information on the identity of the GMOs to be forwarded by one operator to another and by the operator to the consumer as well as derogations to be granted in the event of accidental presence of GMOs. The third question established the link with international discussions on a unique code, in particular within the OECD and in the fora of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety.

Most of the Member States supported the main features of the Commission proposal. When it came to the details their positions were more nuanced. Regarding the derogations to be granted in the event of adventitious traces of GMOs being found in products not intended for direct use in the environment, opinions were divided on the cases in which provision could be made for such derogations, most of the Member States preferring to limit them to GMOs that were already authorised. Regarding the accidental presence of unauthorised GMOs, a number of Member States were in favour of examining each case on the basis of scientific data.

While considering that a unique code system developed at the international level to identify GMOs would be preferable, a majority raised the possibility of taking forward the development of such a system in order to avoid excessive delay in implementing a traceability system within the Community.

The question of a moratorium was also raised during the debate. The President concluded that a majority of Member States agreed that there was a link between extending the authorisations and a specific regulatory framework with a traceability system and transparent labelling enabling the consumer to make a choice on the basis of clear information.



The proposal for a Regulation makes provision for establishing a traceability system making it possible to trace GMOs and products produced from GMOs from the first time they are placed on the market and throughout the production and distribution chains. The aim is to help protect human health and the environment and to provide the consumer with relevant information on the nature of the products by means of labelling. This proposal and the one relating to the labelling of genetically modified food and feed constitute a package proposed by the Commission in July 2001.

### **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN THE DRAWING UP OF ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND PROGRAMMES**

The Council agreed a common approach on the proposal for a Directive providing for public participation in respect of the drawing up of certain plans and programmes relating to the environment. It instructed the Permanent Representatives Committee to examine the Opinion adopted by the European Parliament on first reading so that the Council could adopt its common position at a forthcoming meeting.

The aim of the proposal is to implement the provisions of the second pillar of the 1998 Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters at Community level. The aim is to enable the public to intervene at an early stage in the decision-making process. The proposal is also intended to amend two existing Directives, one on the assessment of environment impact and the other on the prevention and reduction of pollution.

Article 1 of the proposal provides for public participation in the drawing up of plans and programmes relating to the environment within the framework of Directives listed in Annex I concerning waste management, batteries and accumulators, the protection of waters against nitrate pollution and air quality management.

Article 2 supplements Directive 85/337/EEC on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment (i.e. large construction works and interventions in the landscape). That Directive already makes provision for public information and consultation.

