

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON NOVEL FOODS AND PROCESSES

REPORT ON NEW TECHNIQUES IN AGRICULTURAL BIOTECHNOLOGY

Issue

A link to a report entitled 'New Techniques in Agricultural Biotechnology' was circulated to the Committee earlier this summer for information. These techniques involve manipulation of the plant genome and have great potential to deliver major improvements in crop production; but there is much debate as to whether they involve genetic modification and whether they should be regulated as such. The report will be discussed by Member States and other interested parties at a meeting in Brussels on 28 September.

Background

1. New plant breeding techniques have evolved rapidly in recent years, allowing much faster and more precise results than conventional plant-breeding techniques. They are seen as a promising new field for the agri-food industry, offering great technical potential. There is, however, considerable debate as to how these new techniques should be regulated and whether some or all of them should fall within the scope of EU legislation on genetically modified organisms (GMOs).
2. The Commission decided that too much time and effort was being wasted debating the legal status of NBTs and not enough time devoted to discussing their application and potential in improving crop technology.
3. To address this issue the Commission asked the newly created Scientific Advice Mechanism to produce a report on NBTs. The report can be found on the following web-page:
<https://ec.europa.eu/research/sam/index.cfm?pg=topics>
4. The Commission asked that the report cover the following topics: (1) an up-to-date overview on new techniques in agricultural biotechnology, the key characteristics of each of these (such as the underlying molecular mechanisms and products obtained and to describe potential agricultural applications of these new techniques (in the field of synthetic biology and gene drives) and (2) to explain the differences and similarities of each new technique as compared to established techniques of genetic modification and conventional breeding techniques.

5. These topics were addressed according to the following criteria: (a) safety for health and the environment, (b) possibilities for the detection of the respective products, (c) speed of development and the cost of developing products, and (d) the expected result and the degree of maturity for field applications.
6. The report will be the subject of a conference on 28 September 2017 entitled: 'Modern Biotechnologies in Agriculture - Paving the way for responsible innovation.'
<https://ec.europa.eu/research/sam/index.cfm?pg=events&eventcode=B4FFD828-93EF-8919-8441478EB8909D30>

Committee action sought

7. The report is presented for information only so no definitive action is necessary; however, if you wish to submit comments you can do so by e-mail to the ACNFP inbox.

**Secretariat
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