



Committee of Professional Agricultural Organisations in the EU
General Confederation of Agricultural Co-operatives in the EU

COEXISTENCE OF GENETICALLY MODIFIED, CONVENTIONAL AND ORGANIC CROPS

FREEDOM OF CHOICE

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PANEL ON CONSUMER ATTITUDE AND MARKET RESPONSES TO GMOS, VIEWPOINT OF STAKEHOLDERS

INTRODUCTION

- I would like to thank the organizers for having invited COPA and COGECA to make a presentation at this very interesting and challenging conference.
- I think it is important for me to give you a short introduction on what COPA and COGECA are before tackling the subject of this panel. It will help to better understand the position that I will be explaining later on.
- COPA - COGECA is an umbrella organisation which represents at EU-25 level both National Farmers Unions and National Agriculture Cooperative Federations, in total 73 organisations. Those two entities are complementary and have been working together in a Brussels-based office on a daily basis for over 48 years. COPA and COGECA represent a sector of over 15 million people working on farms and over 40.000 cooperatives. To make a long story short we represent organic farmers, conventional farmers, and also farmers who want and use GMOs. We represent seed producers, feed manufacturers, cereal, sugar, oilseed and protein crops growers. We deal with environmental issues, food and feed safety and consumer affairs,... just to mention a few,
- You will then understand and please note that the statements I'm going to express on GMOs are the result of numerous compromises amongst our members. These statements are reflecting the large majority view.

- This is why, we didn't manage to get all our members (no unanimity but a large majority) to subscribe. For more details please refer to our official positions. I encourage you to find them on our web site : www.copa-cogeca.be
- Having said that, I will take the opportunity of being with you today to explain COPA-COGECA's broad views on *farmers and co-ops perspectives on market responses to GMO's*. Mr. KOFOED will then focus on specific aspects, in particular seeds.

I – FARMERS CANNOT JUST IGNORE INNOVATION AS A WORLD WITHOUT INNOVATION IS A DECLINING WORLD

- European farmers and their co-operatives aim to provide for and satisfy consumer demands for high quality, safe food using production methods which protect the environment and meet the wider needs and concerns of society.
- Outside the EU, the use of gene technology in agriculture, especially genetically modified crops, has increased during the last ten years. In Europe, however, the potential use of this technology in agriculture has raised many questions on the potential benefits and concerns of this technology. Recognising society's concerns, COPA and COGECA consider that European farmers and their cooperatives cannot ignore these developments or reject them out of hand without a fully informed debate.
- All food chain partners are certainly key drivers for acceptance, in particular retailers.

II - THE USE OF GENE TECHNOLOGY – NOT RESTRICTED TO GMO'S - IN AGRICULTURE SHOULD BE BASED ON THE FOLLOWING PRINCIPLES

- Consumer safety and confidence is paramount. Equally, it is essential that the use of gene technology does not compromise the environment, including biodiversity.
- The authorisation for placing GMOs on the EU market must be based on comprehensive scientific assessment. When the scientific assessment is inconclusive or incomplete, the precautionary principle should apply. Constant post-release monitoring must be carried out to ensure continued health and environmental protection.
- The use of gene technology in agriculture has to allow the possibility of choice between GMOs and non GMOs. It is essential therefore, that all actors in the food chain, from farmers to consumers, are informed. This has been achieved with the introduction of a clear, informative labelling system of GMOs which has to be practically feasible.
- It is essential that the regulatory approach taken by the EU also covers imported products, especially processed food derived from GMOs.
- COPA and COGECA welcome the voluntary establishment of "GMO" or "GM-free" production zones, providing all producers concerned agree. This possibility could form part of common framework provisions.

III – WE FIRMLY BELIEVE COEXISTENCE IS POSSIBLE – COEXISTENCE IS NOT A SAFETY ISSUE AND SHOULD FOCUS ON ECONOMIC ASPECTS

- Taking the maize example

First of all, we have to remind that growers trust competent authorities for placing on the market new varieties. They are confident in the two types of official evaluations conducted for such varieties: one regarding the GM event carried out by National and European scientific authorities, the other one by the National variety registration authorities.

Secondly, the reasons why Spanish maize growers have cultivated BT maize since 1998 on increasing areas to reach in 2005 more than 50 000 ha are simple:

- ↪ Practically and economically, coexistence is possible with the other 90 % Spanish maize area,
 - ↪ Growers see interest for BT maize as it enables them to reduce pesticide uses and to comply with the EU legislation on mycotoxin thresholds in the food and feed sector,
 - ↪ There are real markets for GM maize in Spain and in other EU countries in particular for the feed sector: let us not forget that EU is largely relying on imports of proteins, which are massively GM varieties. 90 % of the international trade of soy is produced from GM varieties; this rate will increase with the development of GM soybean production in Brazil.
- Coexistence is not new for growers. They are used to growing different types of maize with specific conditions for seed maize, waxy or sweet corn.

- In November 2005, COPA-COGECA organised a colloquy on co-existence which clearly showed that coexistence is possible for maize. The case of rapeseed was not as conclusive. It confirmed that we should move ahead on a case by case basis. Now we can see BT maize area growing up in the EU because it represents one answer to a specific problem.
 - As another example, French maize producers have established a research program for 3 years from 2002 to 2004 to determine practical rules to ensure coexistence from field to silos between BT maize and non GM maize. As a result, they have defined clear and simple rules for coexistence implemented for the first time in 2005 by 15 maize growers without any problem. For the second year in 2006 maize growers willing to grow BT maize will apply such rules within the framework defined and based on experience by the French maize growers association.
 - It is interesting to note that the results of these French studies were similar to the ones obtained in Germany, Spain and Italy. The pollen flow is not really different from a country to another!
- We have recently seen new studies in particular the JRC study of Feb. 2006 clearly showing that **“coexistence in crop production at a 0.9% threshold is feasible with few or no changes in agricultural practices”**.
 - This is very important for us as **we consider that the precondition for co-existence** is that the sector must be economically viable under the constraints applied to it. This viability must be secured in the long term and take account of the possible development of GM-crops.
 - Co-existence supposes the existence of different types of agriculture, **without excluding** one or another type.
 - As there currently are conventional "non-GM" sectors and organic production sectors with an economic system that functions, measures can be taken to avoid that the introduction of "GMOs" jeopardises this balance. Therefore, the development of "GM" sectors can take place in such a way that the conventional and organic sectors are **safeguarded**.

- Finally, in general, agricultural producers and their co-operatives consider that the development of "GM" and "non-GM" sectors shall **not entail extra costs** which would form additional constraints for the production sector without financial return.
- Competition is a key issue for us in particular in the current WTO discussions dealing with opening markets. What we would not like as farmers is giving up market shares to imported products made from GM crops grown elsewhere in the world and not being able to grow these same crops in Europe. This would be putting EU farmers at a disadvantage.
- We do welcome all the efforts from the Commission to bring us clear and comprehensive information on the current state of play on coexistence measures in Member States. This was definitely needed. Thank you for that. What we can see is that very little has happened and what happened is quite different between countries.
- Equally, we did also welcome the substance of the Commission' Recommendation although we had preferred it to be a Regulation. As European organisations, we still believe that Member States "**should**" and not just "might" take coexistence measures to avoid nothing to happen. We are living in a single market where goods, persons, services and genes can freely move regardless of borders.

NOW I will give the floor to Mr KOFOED to express our concerns on a specific topic: SEEDS