

**Codex Committee on Food Labelling
(39th Session)**

Quebec City, Canada

(9-13 May 2011)

**European Union comments on the Proposals of the Facilitated Work
Session**

(Agenda item 6b)

*European Union competence
European Union vote*

The European Union (EU) is pleased to provide comments on the outcome of the facilitated work session which took place in Brussels on 15-16 November 2010.

The EU wishes to congratulate Prof. Josephine Nketsia-Tabiri who brilliantly chaired this facilitated session and Mr. Paul Mayers for his contribution to this new approach as the facilitator of the meeting.

In our comments to CL 2010/19-FL, we identified 3 objectives which according to us were motivating the development of a Codex document on the labelling of foods derived from modern biotechnology:

The **first objective** is that Codex should acknowledge that several approaches for GM labelling are conceivable, from total absence of labelling to full labelling. This was a clear outcome of the working group which took place in Oslo in February 2007 where 6 approaches were identified. All these approaches aim at addressing consumers' needs and in some instances food producers' willingness to provide information which may vary across the world; there are valuable arguments behind each of these approaches. Every Codex member should be in a position to choose one of these approaches according to its policy and to the needs of its consumers. Informing the consumers about the nature of the food is totally in line with one of the two basic objectives of Codex which is to "ensure fair practices in the food trade".

The **second objective** is to give guidance to developing countries. This request was repeated at many occasions during the recent plenary sessions of CCFL. Several approaches are currently implemented all over the world in various countries. Many countries, including developing countries, have on-going reflections on the approach to follow and would welcome general guidance by Codex. This is really the basic mission of Codex: give guidance to its members. This guidance should take the form of an official Codex text; this essential task cannot indeed be delegated to another body or its content cannot be relegated in a "non-paper" or a background paper. Such guidance would define a general framework with the

view to progress in the harmonization of requirements applied to foods and in doing so to facilitate international trade.

The **third objective** is to clarify that GM labelling is not directly linked to safety as such. Every food on the market has to be safe and Codex has developed guidance for the safety assessment of GM foods. Labelling is for consumer information to allow him/her to make informed choices (in line with the 2nd objective of Codex: ensure fair practices in the food trade).

The EU also wants to take this opportunity to repeat that we do not have at all the intention nor the objective to impose our approach on GM labelling to the rest of the world. The European policy regarding GM labelling was designed to address the needs expressed by the European consumers who want to decide themselves whether or not they want to eat GM foods and make informed choices. This policy is widely supported by European citizens. It is also administered in a non-discriminatory manner and applies equally to domestic production and imports.

Evaluated against these 3 objectives, the outcome of the facilitated work session appears to fulfil very partially objectives 1 and 2 and the EU is really disappointed that such a poor result is the outcome of nearly two decades of work including 3 inter-session working groups and many lengthy debates in the plenary.

But as consensus cannot emerge on a more ambitious outcome despite many attempts, the EU is of the opinion that the text presented as option 1, even if not ideal, could be acceptable as a compromise addressing some of the concerns and requests which were raised at many occasions. The most appropriate title for this document would be the second proposal with some simplification:

"Compilation of references of Codex Standards and related texts relevant to the labelling of foods derived from modern biotechnology"

The EU would be in a position to accept that such a document be forwarded to the Codex Alimentarius Commission for final adoption at step 5/8.