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Press announcement¹

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GMOs: are there any risks ?

Launch of a European Round Table on GMO Safety

Keywords: GMOs (genetically modified organisms), safety, research

On 9 October the Commission will establish a round table on GMO (genetically modified organisms) safety research. At the initiative of Research Commissioner Philippe Busquin, it will bring together European biosafety researchers and other stakeholders, such as consumer organisations, national administrations and industry, to ensure that up-to-date knowledge accompanies the safe use of GMOs. The round table will also allow interested stakeholders to discuss research results coming from the European Research Area and identify new research items.

On the same day, the Commission will publish a report on the results of the biosafety research it has supported over 15 years. Research on the GM plants and derived products so far developed and marketed, following usual risk assessment procedures, has not shown any new risks to human health or the environment, beyond the usual uncertainties of conventional plant breeding. Indeed, the use of more precise technology and the greater regulatory scrutiny probably make them even safer than conventional plants and foods; and if there are unforeseen environmental effects - none have appeared as yet - these should be rapidly detected by our monitoring requirements. On the other hand, the benefits of these plants and products for human health and the environment become increasingly clear.

The round table on GMO safety seeks to raise the voice of science in the GMO debate by establishing an ongoing discussion forum on the research results relating to benefits and risks of GMOs. According to Philippe Busquin: "Between the enthusiastic exaggeration of certain GMO 'crusaders' and the radicalism of a minority among their opponents, there is an urgent need to find room for a reasonable compromise, based on sound and measured scientific arguments of risk assessment and prudent management. This is also an exercise in reconciling science and society, bringing together scientists and the interested public to discuss the results of

¹ For more information on the European Commission's Research DG, including previous press releases, visit our Web site at <http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/>

research and to jointly outline a future research agenda in a co-ordinated way across Europe."

The round table aims to present to a broad range of European stakeholders the results of EC-supported research, and (in the spirit of the European Research Area) national activities, within the EU and elsewhere, and relevant international activities. It seeks to overcome existing prejudices on all sides and avoid sterile polarisation. Dialogue will be encouraged, through informed and structured debate, enabling all parties to be better informed of each other's views and values.

The first meeting of the round table will focus in particular on one GM crop, Bt maize, which was one of the first GM crops to be approved for cultivation in Europe (23 January 1997). A programme was established by the Member States at an early stage for monitoring insect resistance to Bt-maize, and assessing any potential adverse effects for human health and the environment. Other factors favour this focus:

- at least one Member State (Spain) has practical experience in producing Bt maize, and conventional maize is widely grown;
- some Member States have banned the Bt maize from their territories;
- a substantial volume of research has been supported on Bt maize, and many of the results have been published;
- large areas of Bt maize are being grown in third countries (US mainly), who also have monitoring programmes.

EU-sponsored Research on Safety of GMOs: Review of results

Coinciding with the launch of the round table, the Commission is publishing a review of the results of the biosafety research which it has been supporting for over 15 years through 81 projects which have received a total EU-funding of EUR 70 million and have involved over 400 teams from all parts of Europe.

Biosafety research over the past quarter-century has played a key role in accompanying the development and diffusion of products of modern biotechnology, in health care agro-food and the environment. The benefits of more precise methods are becoming clear, and conjectural risks have been and continue to be addressed by corresponding research. **The good news – that no significant problems have been encountered – doesn't always reach the public and political debate.**

The results of the research and growing practical experience, feeding into regulatory and risk management policies, have enabled these to be regularly adapted to facilitate innovation, thus contributing to the safety record to date, and providing a basis for continuing public confidence in the technology and its products.

For additional information:

1. The **round table** e-forum is supported by a dedicated page on the DG RTD Biosociety website: http://Biosociety.dms.it/Home_Bioforum.shtm
2. The **review** is available online at: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/quality-of-life/gmo/>
3. A special theme on GM plants has been published in **RTD info** September 2001: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/rtdinfo.html>

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**Launch of the European Round Table on GMO
Safety**

Press briefing programme

Time	Speaker
12:15	P. Busquin, Research Commissioner
12:25	Dr Phil Dale, John Innes Institute of Plant Science Research (UK), plant genetics specialist and member of the European round table
12:35	Discussion

For more information about the European Union's research activities in the field of life sciences and technologies:

<http://www.cordis.lu/life/>

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