



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
JOINT RESEARCH CENTRE

Institute for Prospective Technological Studies
Agriculture and Life Sciences in the Economy

Minutes First meeting of the European GMO Socio-Economics Bureau (Sevilla 29/1/2013)

List of participants in annex

Introduction to the ESEB

- 1) Presentation by DG SANCO describing the policy background and rationale for the establishment of the European GMO socio-economics bureau, from here on called ESEB.(presentation in annex)
- 2) JRC presented the mandate for the ESEB. The presentation focused on those parts of the mandate for which the ESEB had to refine in the first plenary meeting.

Review of the Terms of Reference document

During a tour de table followed by a discussion the different parts of the Terms of Reference (ToR) were reviewed and in some cases ambiguities were clarified.

1) Scope:

- a) The ToR identifies the scope as the socio-economic impact of GM crop cultivation and use. Some ESEB members suggested interpreting the term "use" as the import of GM crops or derived products. The ESEB agrees to predominantly focus on the socio-economic impact of GM cultivation in the EU as this reflects the original mandate of the Council after which ESEB is created. However, when discussing the down stream impacts of GM crops, the domestic supply of GM crops will induce effects which are similar or shared with imported GM crops. Hence the effect of imports on the supply chain will be included indirectly.
- b) ESEB decided to structure its outputs (consensus documents) based on crop/trait combinations. However, it was noted that the work should start at the aggregate level in order to assure that the framework is consistent throughout different consensus documents and covers a wide enough scope. From the general framework the need for specific crop/trait indicators and methodologies will be derived. This approach assures compatibility between the different consensus documents.
- c) Extensive discussion took place on the priority of crop/trait combinations to be tackled by the ESEB. Given the limited resources available and the need to establish a 2-years work programme, the decision was to focus on those crops that are cultivated in the EU or in the regulatory pipeline.

This reduces the set of potential crop/trait combinations to: Bt maize, HT maize, HT soybean and HT sugar beet. Other crop/traits combinations e.g. crops with enhanced nutritional composition or drought tolerance can be considered in a later period. It was noted by JRC that research activities on the socio-economic impacts of crops could be included in future proposals for the internal work programme of the JRC, if considered relevant by the ESEB work plan. This point was picked up again in a later session during the day.

2) Working procedures:

- a) The Work Program (WP) and the different consensus documents will be presented to the Competent Authorities of Directive 2001/18/EC (CA) as a complement to the Advisory Group of the Food Chain, Animal Health and Plant Health already referred to in the ToR. The role of both groups is to provide feedback on the documents for the ESEB to consider.
- b) The procedure to appoint ESEB members for MS not having done so shall stay open until the work on the first consensus document starts.
- c) The ESEB secretariat will study the possibility of alternating the ESEB meetings between Brussels and Sevilla in order to attract as much ESEB members as possible.
- d) The members insisted on a structured way to exchange information in order to increase the transparency and the interaction between members. The ESEB secretariat will investigate the different options available and launch the online platform as early as possible.

Actions:

- JRC and DG SANCO adapt the Terms of Reference in order to reflect the decisions taken (end of February 2013).
- DG SANCO communicates to the MS that the procedure to appoint ESEB members stays open until May 1st 2013.
- ESEB secretariat will evaluate different electronic platforms to exchange the information in an interactive, efficient and user friendly way.

Work program 2013-2014

The ESEB secretariat presented a proposal for a 2 year Working Program (WP).

The main elements of the proposal were:

- 1) Two meetings per year will be held. The location of the meetings will be either Seville or Brussels depending on organisational possibilities, with the aim to alternate both sites has to be decided as discussed earlier.

- 2) The work program is to cover activities until mid 2015 as members requested more time to discuss the different drafts prepared by ESEB with their countries' networks of experts/stakeholders.
- 3) Three consensus documents will be issued during this period, which will be focused in on socio-economic assessment of cultivation of Bt maize (both ex ante and ex post), HT soybean (ex ante) and HT maize (ex ante).
- 4) The successive drafts of the consensus documents will be initiated by the ESEB-secretariat and distributed among the ESEB members allowing them to contact their national networks of experts and stakeholders. Specific timeframes are indicated in the attached proposal for the WP.

Actions:

- The ESEB secretariat submits a detailed proposal for the WP on which ESEB members can comment until 15/3/2013.

Ongoing and planned activities on socio-economic assessment of GMOs performed at national level

- 1) JRC introduced this session by presenting the activities of the JRC-IPTS AGRITECH action in the field of agronomic and socio-economic impacts of GM crops. Research on this topic takes place in IPTS since 2004, and has originated numerous papers and reports. The JRC proposed to align future research studies with the needs of the ESEB. Feedback on interests and needs for this alignment should be communicated to the ESEB secretariat.
- 2) The ESEB members presented the past and planned activities in their countries. The written contribution supporting these presentations can be found as an annex to these minutes. Main conclusions from the tour de table are:
 - a) Several MS have commissioned or performed research on the socio-economic impact of GM crops in the recent past.
 - i) Austria commissioned two studies covering the potential scope of assessments and options for action.
 - ii) France has a specific governmental body, the Haute Conseil des Biotechnologies, which includes an economic, ethical and social committee. This committee works case by case for specific opinions but also works on wider issues. Recently they commissioned three studies; on farm level impacts, on competitiveness of the agricultural sector and on the capacity of the agro industry to cope with the major GM crops.
 - iii) Hungary commissioned a study to assess the impact of GM crops in Hungarian agriculture.
 - iv) Lithuania published different studies on the impact of GM crops on the domestic market and the social environment. A system of criteria enabling the assessment of economic consequences of GM crops is introduced.
 - v) In the Netherlands different reports have been published proposing frameworks to assess the socio-economic and sustainability impact

associated to GM crops and presenting a literature overview on sustainability of GM crops.

- vi) Slovenia commissioned a study on the impact of GM crops in the society. The assessment and the criteria are focused around the opinion and perception of citizens through an extensive poll.
- vii) Sweden issued a report on the impact of GM crops focusing on the economic and environmental effect. They also consider the opportunity cost of not accepting GM crops in the country.
- b) Several MS organised meetings with experts and stakeholders which allowed them to get an overview of the knowledge and expertise in their country.
- c) A group of countries supplemented their contribution with reports and academic papers as first round of information provision for the ESEB.
- d) Most of the countries plan to focus their future activities around the activities of the ESEB and the Cartagena Protocol. Depending on the specificity and the national interest some MS consider providing resources. This could be a key factor in the success of the ESEB. On top some ad hoc studies are taking place.

Actions:

- ESEB members communicate their suggestions for priorities on research activities/studies within the internal work programme AGRILIFE unit of the JRC-IPTS. While suggestions can be accepted continuously, feedback before 15/3/2013 would be appreciated in order to align this with the preparation of the JRC work program for 2014 and beyond.

Participants noted the importance of keeping track of the discussions in the Cartagena protocol, and raised the possibility of using the ESEB's network and expertise for contributions to these exchanges.

Annexes to the minutes:

- Agenda of the first ESEB meeting.
- List of participants.
- DG SANCO presentation.
- Proposal Work Plan 2013-2015.
- Contributions by the ESEB members on the past, current and anticipated activities in the field of socio-economics of GM crops.