

What is a 'conventional GMO'?

EU Commission embraces new industry-led terminology

16 June 2021 / Testbiotech is today publishing a backgrounder showing how the EU Commission is trying to establish new official terminology which is set to cause 'fundamental confusion' in regulation. Experts with close affiliations to the biotech industry were the first to introduce the new term 'conventional GMO' to imply that the methods used in genetic engineering would have no inherent generic risks. This term was then embraced in an EU Commission report without any explanation or justification. A possible consequence could be wide ranging deregulation of genetically engineered organisms 'through the backdoor'.

The new 'industry-friendly' term is used in a Commission report on new genomic techniques (New GE), published in April 2021. The term 'conventional GMO' appears throughout the text as well as in the glossary, and is used to mean 'transgenic'. This gives the impression that genetic engineering is as safe as conventional breeding.

This new terminology is in clear contradiction to a European Court of Justice ruling and EU GMO regulation: the well-established legal meaning of 'conventional' lies in the application of traditional breeding methods based on the usage of genetic diversity and natural biological mechanisms. The resulting characteristics can also occur naturally and are considered to be safe. Conversely, genetic engineering techniques are associated with specific inherent risks and can result in genetic changes unlikely to occur in nature.

This established legal and scientific differences between conventional breeding and genetic engineering is defined in EU Directive 2001/18/EC and applied by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA). According to the European Court of Justice (Case C-528/16) ruling, genetically engineered plants need to be regulated and are not 'conventional'.

The new terminology used by the EU Commission blurs these differences, which are the foundation of EU GMO regulation. As shown in the new backgrounder, the term 'conventional GMO' was first introduced by experts with close affiliations to the biotech industry, who actively lobby for the deregulation of old and new GE.

Testbiotech now requests the EU Commission to carefully review its report on New GE and also refers to another analysis already published.

Contact:

Christoph Then, info@testbiotech.org [1], Tel + 49 (0) 151 54638040

Further information: [New Testbiotech backgrounder](#) [2]

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