

International virtual conference on scientific advice to policy-makers and society

## Genome Editing in Europe: New Agenda or New Disputes? Sharing Knowledge in Designing EU's Future GMO Regulation

Zoom webinar link: <https://cutt.ly/eu-genome-editing>



**Target audience:** policy-makers from the European Commission, Council and Parliament as well as Member States, scientific community from Europe and worldwide, and stakeholders from civil society, farmers' associations, plant breeding associations, business etc.

*Note: due to complex and changing COVID-19 restrictions, the conference will now be held as a series of Zoom webinars. The conference will be streamed live on YouTube and Facebook. Q&As are only possible in the Zoom webinars.*

**Rationale:** In light of the ECJ Judgment of 25 July 2018 in Case C-528/16 on the interpretation of the GMO Directive 2001/18/EC, the European Council asked the EC on 8 November 2019 to submit by April 2021 a study on the "status of novel genomic techniques under Union law".<sup>1</sup> If recommendable, the study shall include a "proposal" that might transcend into a legislative proposal amending the existing EU regulatory framework on GMOs. A comprehensive review of foreign regulatory frameworks should form an important part of the factual foundations of this study.

Taking notice of the diversity of reactions to the ECJ Judgement from local to EU-level and from business to consumers, the German Science Academies and the German Research Foundation (DFG) decided to bring light into the debate through scientific evidence-based facts. Hence, they released a report<sup>2</sup> drawn up by an interdisciplinary group of experts in the field. This report calls for a more differentiated approach to regulation of GMOs in Europe, stressing the need to develop a forward-looking new regulatory framework, and to insert scientific facts into the design of policy and regulation.

The meeting intends to be an agora for discussing the latest aspects of GMOs in Europe and the world, focussing on the prospects of EU regulation in the field and on the optimal use of scientific findings in policy design and consumer protection. Additionally, the report commissioned by the German Science Academies and the German Research Foundation will be presented.

<sup>1</sup> Retrievable at: [https://ec.europa.eu/food/plant/gmo/modern\\_biotech/new-genomic-techniques\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/food/plant/gmo/modern_biotech/new-genomic-techniques_en).

<sup>2</sup> Retrievable at: <https://bit.ly/30ieK2h>.

## Provisional programme:

Note: all times are CEST (GMT+2).

Day 1	
1 October 2020	
<b>Official opening</b>	
11:00 – 11:06	Professor Gerald Haug, President, German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina
11:06 – 11:12	Professor Katja Becker, President, German Research Foundation
11:13 – 11:20	Dr Lorenz Franken, German Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture
<b>Session 1: Scientific Advice on Rethinking EU's GMOs Regulatory Framework</b>	
<p>Genome editing methods enable directed, cost- and timesaving modifications of the genome of crops, often indistinguishable from naturally occurring mutations and from the results of traditional breeding methods. More than 100 (potentially) marketable genome-edited crops are known for their benefits to nutrition. They have higher productivity and require less use of pesticides, and enable a more sustainable and resource-saving agriculture. The shortcomings of regulating genome-edited organisms (GEOs) in the same way as genetically modified organisms (GMOs) call for a general overhaul of the EU's regulatory framework in this field. The session intends to discuss the state of affairs and prospects for such an undertaking.</p>	
11:20 – 11:23	Introduction by the moderator Professor Justus Wesseler, Wageningen University & Research
11:23 – 11:35	Professor Martin Qaim, University of Göttingen <i>Urgency to Overhaul EU's GMO Regulation in the Context of Climate Change, Sustainable Agriculture and Economic Pressure</i>
11:35 – 11:47	Professor Hans-Georg Dederer, University of Passau <i>Scientific Recommendations by the German Science Academies and the German Research Foundation</i>
11:47 – 12:00	Discussion with Q&A from the audience
12:00 – 13:00	Lunch break
<b>Session 2: Role and Competitiveness of EU's R&amp;D for Sustainable Agriculture</b>	
<p>The EU's regulatory framework imposes undue pressure on both researchers and plant breeders. Field trials of GMOs require an authorisation and have to be publicly registered. In the past, these circumstances led to an extensive destruction of test fields, thus triggering a chilling effect on open-field research in the EU. Further, it leads to a relocation of plant breeding research to countries with a more favourable regulatory climate, such as the USA. The GMO authorisation procedure is time-consuming, costly and highly unpredictable due to over-politicisation of the matter in public debates. Therefore, the amendment or complete re-draft of EU's GMO regulation should reinforce Europe's global top role in R&amp;D on GMOs and GEOs, in plant breeding and agriculture. The session intends to search for ways and means to achieve this strategic aim.</p>	
13:00 – 13:03	Introduction by the moderator Maryline Fiaschi, Managing Director, Science   Business
13:03 – 14:00	Viola von Cramon-Taubadel MEP, European Parliament, Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance

Discussion With initial statements and Q&A from the audience	Dr Wolfgang Burtscher, Director-General, European Commission Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development
	Dr Sabine Jülicher, Director, European Commission Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety
	Dr Petra Jorasch, Manager Plant Breeding Innovation Advocacy, Euroseeds
	Pekka Pesonen, Secretary-General, Copa & Cogeca European Farmers' Associations
	Professor Dirk Inzé, VIB-UGent Center for Plant Systems Biology
14:00 – 14:30	Coffee break
<p><b>Session 3: Socio-economic and Environmental Concerns of GMOs</b></p> <p>A new EU GMO regulatory framework should take into consideration legitimate societal, economic and environmental concerns as voiced by different actors, such as end consumers, farmers, environmental activists or SMEs. Equally, the regulation must accommodate the fundamental objectives of environmental protection, nature conservation and sustainable agriculture. According to the precautionary principle, the benefits of new molecular breeding methods and their products need appropriate consideration in a problem-oriented manner, building upon the experience with conventional genetic engineering over the past three decades. The session intends to bring current debates onto a more objective level, through rational analysis and inclusive dialogue.</p>	
14:30 – 14:33	Introduction by the moderators Professor Gerald Haug, German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina Professor Axel Brakhage, Vice President, German Research Foundation
14:33 – 14:43	Pablo Orozco, LL.M, Cornell Alliance for Science <i>Socio-economic Concerns in Light of the Sustainable Development Goals</i>
14:43 – 14:53	Dr Monika Messmer, Swiss Research Institute on Organic Agriculture (FiBL) <i>Impact of Future GMO Regulation Scenarios on the Organic Sector</i>
14:53 – 15:03	Professor Sabine Schlacke, University of Münster <i>Application of the Precautionary Principle – the European vs. the Anglo-American Approach</i>
15:03 – 15:13	Professor Alexandra-Maria Klein, University of Freiburg, Germany <i>Biodiversity and Agricultural Practice</i>
15:13 – 15:30	Discussion with Q&A from the audience
15:30	End of day 1
<b>Day 2                      2 October 2020</b>	
<p><b>Session 4 Part 1: Regulation of GEOs in the EU and Worldwide</b></p> <p>It follows from the ECJ Judgment of 25 July 2018 in Case C-528/16 that GEOs are GMOs within the meaning of, and governed by, Directive 2001/18/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 March 2001. Therefore, GEOs are subject to the legal framework applicable to GMO release, placing on the market, labelling and traceability. Having in mind the EU's major international trading partners and competitors, there is a tendency to exempt certain GEOs from the rules applicable to GMOs. This applies, in particular, to Argentina, Australia, Japan and the United States. In Canada, genome-edited seeds may be subject to a product-based authorisation process if they result in "novel traits" of the respective seeds. Therefore, the EU has to deal with asymmetric regulatory approaches</p>	

worldwide. This can set unjustifiable trade barriers, which can lead to so-called “trade wars”. The session intends to explore similarities and differences in GMO regulation, having in mind international trade between the EU and its major trading partners.	
12:30 – 12:35	Introduction by the moderator Professor Piet van der Meer, Ghent University & Free University Brussels
12:35 – 12:45	Professor Lonneke Poort, Erasmus University Rotterdam & The Netherlands Commission on Genetic Modification <i>GEO Regulation in the EU</i>
12:45 – 12:55	Professor Karinne Ludlow, Monash University (GMT+10/CEST+8/AEST) <i>GEO Regulation in Australia</i>
12:55 – 13:05	Professor Tetsuya Ishii, Hokkaido University (GMT+9/CEST+7/JST) <i>GEO in Japan: Past, Present and Future</i>
13:05 – 13:30	Discussion with Q&A from the audience
13:30 – 14:00	Coffee break
14:00 – 16:00	Science slam (tbd)
<b>Session 4 Part 2: Regulation of GEOs in the EU and Worldwide</b>	
16:00 – 16:05	Introduction by the moderator Professor Hans-Georg Dederer, University of Passau
16:05 – 16:15	Professor Martin Lema, National University of Quilmes (GMT-3/CEST-5/ART) <i>GEO Regulation in Argentina</i>
16:15 – 16:25	Professor Margaret Rosso Grossman, University of Illinois (GMT-5/CEST-7/CDT) <i>GEO Regulation in the USA</i>
16:25 – 16:35	Professor Stuart Smyth, University of Saskatchewan (GMT-6/CEST-8/CST) <i>GEO Regulation in Canada</i>
16:35 – 17:00	Discussion with Q&A from the audience
17:00	End of conference

Subject to change. As of 17 September 2020.