

OPTA Europe's contribution to public consultation on legislation for plants products by certain new genomic techniques

OPTA Europe - www.opta-eu.org - is the membership organization representing the interest of EU organic processing and trade companies, as officially recognized by EU institutions. Its membership encompasses 12 EU Member States plus 2 non-EU countries. Taken together, the companies represented by OPTA Europe account for a large share of total EU import & export and processing of organic products.

— KEY MESSAGES —

- ▶ We invite EU lawmakers to stand firmly on the side of agroecology, which excludes gene editing.
- ▶ Should NGTs be allowed:
 - mandatory traceability and labelling of all products obtained through NGTs along the supply chain will be necessary for organic operators to fulfill the NGT prohibition.
 - the additional costs related to prevention and monitoring of NGTs in the organic supply chain must be borne by NGT manufacturers, as well as a compensation to the organic operator when damage -presence of NGT material- is confirmed.

The share of EU agricultural land under organic farming has steadily increased in the last decade, to reach 9.9% of the total agricultural area in the Union in 2021. Under the Green Deal, the European Commission has set a target of 'at least 25% of the EU's agricultural land under organic farming by 2030'. Despite their fundamental differences, conventional and organic food & farming need to move forward side by side. For both systems to effectively coexist, policy measures must be in place to ensure a balance between their respective interests.

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We welcome that the draft ‘Regulation on plants obtained by certain new genomic techniques and their food and feed’ enacts the incompatibility of NGTs with the principles underlying organic food and farming as well with consumer’s perception of organic products. In our views, both systems are also mutually exclusive because of cross-breeding: the authorization of NGTs compromises the legitimate GMO-free business of EU organic companies.

As the EU stands at a crossroads concerning the future of our food system, we invite lawmakers to stand firmly on the side of agroecology, which excludes gene editing.

Should the authorization of NGTs be maintained, we invite Parliament and Council to amend the Commission’s proposal with binding provisions as below:

- **Mandatory traceability and labelling of all products obtained through NGTs to protect the integrity of the organic supply chain**

Organic consumers expect products to be produced without genetic engineering and will request such guarantee from the food brands they choose. The proposed regulation includes measures to allow operators at the beginning of the food chain to identify products obtained from NGTs and to avoid them if so wanted. This relies on a simplistic conception of the food supply chain, whose length and complexity vary greatly and may involve multiple flows of raw materials and ingredients which go through several stages -processing, packaging, storage, transport- performed by different actors -suppliers, packhouses, transporters, wholesalers, retailers. Admixtures cannot be excluded, despite the segregation measures already in place.

Due to the detection challenges for 1NGT products, which might not differ from those obtained via conventional breeding, the quality control measures - including laboratory methods- which are regularly conducted along the organic supply will not be sufficient to guarantee their absence in the final product.

Thus, meeting the NGT-free commitment with consumer can only be achieved through robust documentary traceability as well as labels affixed or provided throughout the organic supply chain, so that each actor at every step is fully informed if products obtained from NGTs are involved.

- **In line with the polluter-pays-principle, NGTs manufacturers to bear the additional costs related to prevention and monitoring in the organic supply chain, as well as a compensation to the organic operator when damage -presence of NGT material- is confirmed.**

Coexistence between the organic and conventional sectors must be based on a balance of interests, which this legislation fails to provide. It will considerably reduce administrative burden and compliance costs for NGT manufacturers while increasing them for organic operators, in a way that will reduce competitiveness of organic products.

To strike a proper balance, we request a mechanism that make NGT manufacturers bear the additional costs related to prevention and monitoring of NGTs in the organic supply chain. Indeed, at every stage, operators will need to implement additional documentation and third-party verification, to guarantee the integrity of the supply.

This adds up to the measures already in place to avoid contamination from chemical pesticides used in conventional farming, which have resulted in multiplication of documentary checks and laboratory analysis, putting cost and burden on the shoulders of the organic operator -who is not using them.

Furthermore, in cases where adventitious NGT presence would be confirmed by any actor in the supply chain, the product could not qualify for organic; it will be lost or marketed as conventional, at the expense of the organic operator. Thus, a compensation must be foreseen.

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