

PRESS RELEASE

New EU research project:

Reliable Coexistence of Foodproducts with and without Genetic Modification

The conditions under which organic, conventional and genetically modified (GM) agricultural products can be grown, transported and marketed side by side is established by the EU member states. A new European research project now compares the framework conditions in individual countries and determines their costs for farmers, traders and consumers. This should lead to identifying those strategies that secure best the freedom of choice for consumers, as well as a cost-effective production of foodstuffs. The Technische Universität München (TUM) co-ordinates this research project supported by the European Union with around 4 million euro.

Conventional, organic or genetically modified – consumers should have a free choice between these products. This freedom of choice is a central goal of the European agricultural policy. It is essentially based on the principle of coexistence of different agricultural practices without uncontrolled incrossing and mixing. For this, there are several EU regulations on traceability and labeling of genetically modified products. Moreover, a major part of the legal conditions for coexistence is determined by the individual member states: They set down specific approval procedures and foresee minimum distances between fields with and without genetic modification and segregation measures at transport and storage. Yet, so far little is known about the consequences of such coexistence strategies in practice. How implementable and cost-intensive they are for farmers, traders and consumers, should now be established by a European research project.

Under the co-ordination of Technische Universität München a consortium from fourteen universities, agencies and firms compares the coexistence measures of individual EU member states. On the basis of a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis the scientists aim at developing software that can be used by farmers, seed producers, regional traders as a decision tool for cultivation, processing and transport measures. For this, the cultivation of genetically modified maize in Portugal, Romania, Spain and the Czech Republic serves as a case study.

Moreover, the consortium researches the requirements and costs for all operators in the production chain – from seed production, cultivation, transport and storage to processing in the food and feed industries. Case studies on GM-free milk in Germany and Switzerland should deliver knowledge about the costs and usefulness of segregation measures in the production chain.

“The required segregation of raw materials with and without genetic modification is one of the biggest challenges for the agricultural sector”, says Professor Justus Wesseler who co-ordinates this EU research project on the side of the Technische Universität München. To involve early on the participation of farmers and traders associations, as well as political decision makers is therefore an important goal. “How efficient and cost-effective the European coexistence measures are shaped is not only decisive for consumer prices here but also for the chances of European products on world markets”, according to the agricultural economist.

The three-year research project with the title “Practical Implementation of Coexistence in Europe” is supported by the European Union with around 4 million euro. The project partners are: Technische

Universität München (Germany), EU Joint Research Centre (Belgium), Institut de la Recherche Agronomique, INRA (FRANCE), Università del Sacro Cuore (Italy), Schenkelaars Biotechnology Consultancy (Netherlands), University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine (Romania), University of Reading (United Kingdom), Czech University of Life Sciences Prague (Czech Republic), Fundació Mas Badia (Spain), GeoSys (France), Bundesamt für Verbraucherschutz und Lebensmittelsicherheit (Germany), Instituto Politécnico de Santarém (Portugal), Eidgenössisches Volkswirtschaftsdepartment (Switzerland).

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