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GMO contamination not tolerated in organic farming

Late last year the European Commission published its proposal for the new EU organic regulation. The Proposal for a Council regulation on organic production and labelling of organic products, was designed to be the framework of the regulation, and its publication was intended to launch a European-wide debate on the future of organic agriculture.

One debate that has certainly arisen from the proposal is the GMO controversy. Under the present EU Regulation certified organic producers are not allowed to use any inputs containing GMOs or GMO products. This restriction is unchanged in the Commission's revision proposal. However, the phraseology on GMO labelling used in the document has led many to conclude that under the revised regulation the Commission would allow routine contamination of organic products with GMOs.

On 23 January 2006 the IFOAM EU Group published a statement making it quite clear that in their understanding this is not the case. The statement went on to clarify the group's position by explaining:

'The Commission correctly notes that labelling thresholds under GMO regulations¹ apply equally to organic and conventional non-GM products. While true, this statement is neverthe-

less misleading, because GMO contamination in organic products is not primarily addressed by the GMO regulations, but first, by organic certification and second, by the organic market. ... Furthermore, organic consumers do not accept any GM contamination in organic foods, nor do organic processors and retailers. Thus the organic market operates on the basis of no contamination above the reliable detection limit.'

The IFOAM EU Group felt that organic farmers should not be economically damaged if GM contamination enters the organic food chain. *'The IFOAM EU Group's position is, and remains, that the EU must introduce a proper and effective liability regime. The EU has a duty to ensure those farmers, both organic and non-organic, who wish to remain GMO-free are properly protected in the event of contamination. There has not been and will not be any tolerance at all for GMO contamination of organic products.'* ■

The IFOAM EU Group states its position on GMOs in its 2003 position paper Co-existence between GM and non-GM crops. Necessary anti-contamination and liability measures, available at <http://tinyurl.com/al2se>

¹ 1829/2003 and 1830/2003.

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