



Novel foods: MEPs call for moratorium on nano-foods and labelling of cloned meat

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Draft plans to encourage food innovation via a new, simplified authorization procedure for novel foods were approved by the Environment Committee on Monday. MEPs nonetheless amended the text and proposed a moratorium on the use of nanomaterials in food, based on the precautionary principle. They also added provisions for compulsory labelling of cloned food products.

The draft legislation, approved by 57 votes to 4 with 2 abstentions, lays down clear deadlines and definitions for the entire process of placing a novel food on the market.

"I was pleased that the 20 Compromise Amendments passed in last night's vote without any problems, and also with a relatively few members expressing disagreement. I think this was reflective of the atmosphere of cooperation in the meetings I have had with the shadow rapporteurs thus far, and I hope we continue in a similar vein in the trilogue negotiations" said James Nicholson (ECR, UK) who is steering the legislation through Parliament.

"Nevertheless, I am not completely satisfied with the outcome of the vote. There were certain amendments on animal cloning and nanomaterials that passed, which my colleagues in the ECR and I voted against. I have been very clear from the start of this process, that given the history of the Novel Foods proposals it was essential that cloning and nanomaterials be dealt with separately" he added.

Moratorium on nano-foods

Emerging technologies in food production processes may have an impact on food safety, MEPs say. Foods for which production processes require risk assessments – including nanomaterials – should therefore not be authorized until they are approved by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), say MEPs. Special attention should also be paid to food packaging containing nanomaterials, to prevent them migrating into food. And in line with the precautionary principle, all novel food should also be subject to post-market monitoring, they add.

MEPs also amended the existing definition of nanomaterials to bring it in line with EFSA recommendations (10% nano-particles threshold for a food ingredient to qualify as "nano", whereas the Commission proposed 50%).

Cloned meat labelling

MEPs amended the scope of the legislation to include cloned meat products. Until specific legislation on food derived from cloned animals and their descendants enters into force, this food should fall under the scope of this regulation, and be appropriately labelled for the final consumer, MEPs say.

Member states would be allowed to ban a novel food temporarily, if new information suggests that it may pose a risk to human health or the environment. The Commission, together with EFSA, should then examine the grounds for concern, MEPs say.

A "novel" food is defined as any food that was not used for human consumption within the EU to a significant degree before 15 May 1997. MEPs tightened up this definition to include, inter alia, food with a modified molecular structure, microorganisms, fungi, algae, food obtained from cellular or tissue cultures, or insects.

Press release

Traditional foods from third countries would be allowed on the EU market where its history of safe consumption has been demonstrated for at least 25 years.

Next steps

A mandate for Mr Nicholson to starting negotiations with the Council of Ministers was approved unanimously, with one abstention. The Council has yet to adopt its negotiating position.

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