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Committee on International Trade

2006/2059(INI)

15.9.2006

OPINION

of the Committee on International Trade

for the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development

on Biotechnology: prospects and challenges for agriculture in Europe
(2006/2059(INI))

Draftsman: Enrique Barón Crespo

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SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on International Trade calls on the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions in its motion for a resolution:

1. considers that genetically modified organisms may represent a key element in the multi-functional European agriculture;
2. notes that the global market for genetically modified organisms continues to grow and considers that this ought to be an important growth sector for Europe;
3. considers that, in the long run, the international competitiveness of European agriculture depends to a significant extent on the development of the biotechnology industry and the spillover of its achievement into the economy;
4. believes that genetically modified organisms can help resolve several of the major challenges and problems of our times, e.g. food and energy supplies; the trade in such products is therefore an important instrument for ensuring that countries and people throughout the world can benefit from their potential; this applies not least to poor countries for which genetically modified crops can be an important instrument of development;
5. regrets that as a consequence of the restrictive policy and regulatory approach applied by the Commission and some Member States, the European biotechnology sector is at risk of lagging behind;
6. emphasises that the Commission and the Member States should not adopt or apply less strict rules concerning imported biotechnology products than those applied to similar goods produced in the EU;
7. acknowledges the rapid and growing uptake of biotechnology in general, and GM crops in particular, in farming throughout the world and specifically in countries which are important trading partners of the EU in agricultural products; notes that in 2005, some nine million farmers in Brazil, India, China, South Africa, Canada, the United States and in a growing number of developed and developing countries cultivated almost 90 million hectares of genetically modified products which is the equivalent of the land area cultivated in the EU;
8. is convinced that, on the basis of existing legislation covering approvals for and uses of biotechnology in agriculture in Europe and third countries, enhanced exchanges of information and cooperation will be required in future to safeguard unhampered trade without prejudice to environmental and public safety;
9. acknowledges that the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, which is based on the precautionary principle, constitutes an important forum for addressing the implications of cross-border movement of GMOs; which are only one application of biotechnology; nevertheless, does not believe that the precautionary principle can be used to block all scientific innovation including in the area

of genetic engineering; and considers that the rules governing trade in genetically modified organisms must be laid down within the framework of the WTO; moreover, the rules that are laid down there should be complied with by WTO member countries; considers also that a better balance will need to be found between the WTO system and MEAs;

10. calls on the Commission and the Member States to keep Community and national legislation in line with WTO rules and obligations;
11. stresses that biotechnology, and, in particular GMOs, have had a growing importance in international trade disputes; in the light of the practice of the WTO Dispute Settlement Body, these disputes are solely judged by their conformity with the relevant WTO rules which, as far as trade is concerned, prevail over any other instrument of international law;
12. takes note of the WTO's preliminary ruling on the EU's approval process for GMOs;
13. considers it important that the Commission and the Member States address the final WTO ruling and its findings in an appropriate manner;
14. considers that in view of the interim report of the WTO Panel and the Commission's recent report on the implementation of national measures on the coexistence of genetically modified crops with conventional and organic farming, a total ban on GMO crops is not a viable option; considers that commonly agreed approval processes and/or mutual recognition systems may facilitate the international exchange of goods derived from biotechnology, provided such systems safeguard the necessary high level of environmental and consumer protection and do not prejudice specific requirements as to labelling or traceability as provided for by Community legislation;
15. believes that in the EU coexistence must be organised between conventional agriculture, organic farming and agriculture using genetically modified organisms; considers that clear and transparent coexistence rules, based on solid scientific evidence, are needed; stresses that, in order to avoid further WTO dispute settlement procedures against the Community, coexistence rules must not result in a de facto moratorium in relation to GMO crops;
16. stresses that there is a need for common labelling rules and better consumer information in conformity with WTO rules;
17. considers that by promoting the use of agricultural products for non-food purposes (such as raw materials in pharmaceutical and other industries), biotechnology offers additional outlets for farmers, and helps the European agricultural sector to comply with WTO obligations;
18. regrets the fact that Europe has fallen behind in the development of GM crops; calls therefore for higher priority to be given to support for adequate research and democratic control of genetic resources; and asks Member States to transpose rapidly all the European directives in this area;
19. believes that the use of genetically engineered seeds has made it possible in many parts of the world to reduce the use of pesticides and herbicides, which is in the interests of

protecting the environment and biodiversity; therefore, encourages the Commission to play an active role in, and where required initiate, international discussions for dealing with the practical use of biotechnology in farming and food production, including actions against biopiracy in the developing countries;

20. welcomes the EU's commitment to an ambitious European research policy in the area of plant seeds and, more generally, agricultural biotechnology, the outcome of which will play a fundamental part not only in cutting agricultural pollution but also in meeting the world's constantly growing food requirements; and considers this commitment to be a precondition for achieving its goal to become the world's leading bio-economy in this particular area of application;
21. is of the opinion that the impact of biotechnology on the economics of production of and trade in agricultural products must be assessed in a broad manner, including the possible effects on non-biotech agri-food production, the possible impact of biotechnology on the economics of current and future non-food production such as biomass and biofuels, bio-degradable packaging, medicinal products, etc.; supports an ambitious European research policy in the area of biofuels and, more generally, biomass use, which is of key importance in the present energy context, allowing the EU to boost its exports and limit its imports in order to improve the EU's trade balance;
22. is aware of the existing as well as the potential impact of biotechnology on the competitiveness of plant breeding, farming and food production, in particular in view of the very different rates of uptake of the technology in Europe, in comparison with its main competitors on the international agricultural markets, and calls on the Commission to pay specific attention to this impact in its forthcoming related studies, to inform the European Parliament extensively about it and to put forward specific legislative proposals if and where required;
23. is convinced that Marked Assisted Selection (MAS), which allows the improvement of crops through "smart breeding", i.e. the crossing of plants of similar families rather than their genetic modification through the integration of foreign genes, must provide a major contribution to the development of energy-intensive and at the same time environmentally safe biomass;
24. asks the Commission to contemplate an evaluation system which would ascertain on scientific bases the advantages and risks associated with the use of biotechnologies both for human and animal health and the impact of their use on the environment;
25. backs the right of consumers to be informed and to choose between conventional products and transgenic products;
26. emphasises the importance of biotechnology for the future of sustainable agriculture, for example in developing bioenergy, substitutes for oil products such as plastics and new sustainable methods for growing crops; stresses therefore that more agricultural funds must be allocated out of the CAP to the biotechnology sector, including funds for the education of farmers about the possibilities of biotechnology within the framework of sustainable agriculture.

PROCEDURE

Title	Biotechnology: prospects and challenges for agriculture in Europe	
Procedure number	2006/2059(INI)	
Committee responsible	AGRI	
Opinion by Date announced in plenary	INTA 16.3.2006	
Enhanced cooperation – date announced in plenary	NO	
Drafts(wo)man Date appointed	Enrique Barón Crespo 12.09.2006	
Previous drafts(wo)man	Jonas Sjöstedt 22.2.2006	
Discussed in committee	3.5.2006	11.7.2006
Date adopted	12.9.2006	
Result of final vote	+: 20 -: 4 0: 0	
Members present for the final vote	Jean-Pierre Audy, Daniel Caspary, Giulietto Chiesa, Christofer Fjellner, Béla Glattfelder, Jacky Henin, Alain Lipietz, Caroline Lucas, Erika Mann, Georgios Papastamkos, Godelieve Quisthoudt-Rowohl, Tokia Saïfi, Peter Šťastný, Johan Van Hecke, Daniel Varela Suanzes-Carpegna, Zbigniew Zaleski	
Substitute(s) present for the final vote	Margrietus van den Berg, Jorgo Chatzimarkakis, Robert Goebbels, Maria Martens, Antolín Sánchez Presedo, Jonas Sjöstedt, Mauro Zani	
Substitute(s) under Rule 178(2) present for the final vote	Filip Kaczmarek	
Comments (available in one language only)	...	