

UEAA ACTS TO SAFEGUARD PLANT GENOME EDITING WHICH IS ESSENTIAL TO DEVELOP SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

The UEAA observes that the opinion issued by the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) on 25 July 2018 on the status of mutagenesis puts at risk the use, in the European Union, of new plant breeding techniques (NPBT), including genome editing, by subjecting them to the same GMO directive as plants derived from transgenesis.

It is the capacity of European breeders and seed producers to innovate as well as their world leadership position that is being jeopardized. It is also significantly increasing the risk of EU dependency upon large agricultural countries that invest heavily in these very promising new technologies.

In order for European breeders, public and private, to be able to access genome editing technologies, the UEAA requests the European Commission urgently to clarify that plants resulting from conventional techniques of mutagenesis are excluded from the GMO legislation, and that in light of cumulative scientific information now available regarding their safety, plants which have undergone small DNA changes obtained through genome editing must also be excluded from the provisions of the GMO legislation. For the long term, the UEAA calls for a new GMO directive adapted to modern breeding techniques and enabling science-based evaluation of new plant varieties.

The UEAA supports the joint proposal of WGG (Wissenschaftlerkreis Grüne Gentechnik) and AFBV (Association Française des Biotechnologies Végétales) to set up a validation process allowing a developer to submit to a European competent authority basic information on any plant derived from genome editing to determine its regulatory status: excluded from, or subject to, GMO legislation. Under the WGG-AFBV proposal the following product categories would not be considered as GMOs: (i) null segregants, (ii) deletions regardless of size, (iii) substitution of a single nucleotide pair, and (iv) cisgenes. Countries such as the United States, Brazil, Argentina, Chile and Japan have already begun to put in place a very similar specific process that leads to the same type of exclusions.

For the UEAA, these safeguards for new plant breeding techniques must be implemented urgently to prevent European research from accumulating delays in plant improvement that are necessary to reduce the use of plant protection products, adapt crops to climate change, and increase food security.

Firenze, November 23, 2018

Moved unanimously at the UEAA General Assembly, 23 November 2018