

Ms Sabine Juelicher  
Director Food and feed safety,  
innovation  
European Commission, Directorate-  
General for Health and Food Safety  
Rue Breydel 4,  
1049 Brussels

Brussels, 9<sup>th</sup> January 2020

**Object: EC study on the status of novel genomic techniques**

Dear Mrs Juelicher,

The undersigned value chain partners strongly support Council Decision (EU) 2019/1904 requesting the Commission to submit a study on the status of novel genomic techniques<sup>1</sup> and welcome the potential for a Commission proposal, which we hope will deliver more enabling rules for products resulting from the latest breeding methods, while keeping high standards of EU food production. In this context we would like to re-emphasize our position that products should not be subject to Directive 2001/18 requirements and related regulations if they could also have been obtained through conventional methods or result from spontaneous processes in nature. This differentiated regulatory approach, which looks at both, the process and the product, thus taking into account the benefits of these novel genomic techniques and the resulting products is taken up in a growing number of countries around the world<sup>2</sup>.

We count on you that the above-mentioned study will take a differentiated view on the diverse “new genomic techniques” that might be covered by the study as well as the kind of applications in different groups of organisms. Also, we regard it important to address this topic from a global perspective, taking into account the trade aspect in relation to the policy developments around the world and their implications for competitiveness of the EU Agri-Food value chain as well as the enforceability of the ECJ ruling. The ENGL/JRC report on “Detection of food and feed plant products obtained by new mutagenesis techniques”, published on 26 March 2019 has provided very important insights in this context that must not be ignored.

European Agriculture and its associated value chains will have to meet an increasing demand for high-quality food, feed and bio-based goods using limited resources and producing less emissions. However, it is also one of the sectors already suffering from climate change and more extreme weather conditions. The challenging goals of the European Green Deal and of one of its key components, the Farm to Fork Strategy, can only be achieved if the food chain is part of the solution to adapt to and to mitigate climate change. We agree that in this context

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<sup>1</sup> Council Decision (EU) 2019/1904 of 8 November 2019 requesting the Commission to submit a study in light of the Court of Justice’s judgment in Case C-528/16 regarding the status of novel genomic techniques under Union law, and a proposal, if appropriate in view of the outcomes of the study.

<sup>2</sup> <https://european-seed.com/2019/11/the-eu-gmo-directive-is-no-longer-fit-for-purpose/>

the EU “needs to develop innovative ways to protect harvests and animals from pests and diseases and to consider the potential role of new innovative techniques to improve the sustainability of the food system”<sup>3</sup>. Also, the IPCC report on climate change<sup>4</sup> underscores the need for further breeding innovation to mitigate its effects such as resistance to water and heat stress and resistance to changing pest and disease risks.

However, as a result of the ECJ judgement in case C-528/16 on mutagenesis breeding, the potential of the new breeding techniques remains untapped in Europe. With this, European agriculture and some other of the EU’s most innovative sectors are disconnected from scientific progress, putting them at a competitive disadvantage compared to their counterparts in a rapidly growing group of countries with more enabling regulations. Consequently, Europe’s leading position in innovative breeding is at stake, as are jobs in agriculture, bioindustries and their associated value chains, international trade flows and sustainability.

Farmers and consumers must form a central part of the “Farm to Fork Strategy” under the European Green Deal and we believe that farmers in particular need to have the right toolbox available to support a sustainable food supply chain. As mentioned in its communication on Green Deal, European Commission underlines that new technologies, sustainable solutions and disruptive innovation are critical to achieve the objectives of the European Green Deal. The undersigned agri-food value chain partners are committed to contribute to society and consumer expectations in view of healthy diets, biodiversity and a sustainable agricultural model. We are convinced that targeted mutagenesis breeding (including with genome editing) can contribute to various goals of the European Green Deal by saving land resources, reducing crop protection products, antibiotics and emissions while stabilizing and increasing crop yields and improving animal health and welfare to ensure food security (concrete examples can be accessed here<sup>5</sup>).

Given that discussions on the status of novel genomic techniques have been going on for more than 10 years, we call on you to ensure that this Council decision is part of the European Green Deal and its respective Farm to Fork Strategy and will be implemented in due time.

Yours faithfully,

Céline Duroc, Director General of  
MAIZ'EUROP' for the Platform  
Agriculture and Progress



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<sup>3</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/european-green-deal-communication\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/european-green-deal-communication_en.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2019/08/Fullreport-1.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Modrzejewski et al. (2019): What is the available evidence for the range of applications of genome-editing as a new tool for plant trait modification and the potential occurrence of associated off-target effects: a systematic map. In Environ Evid 8:27 <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13750-019-0171-5>  
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