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GAIN Report

Global Agricultural Information Network

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Turnaround in GE labeling policy

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Agricultural Situation

Agriculture in the News

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Report Highlights:

The new agricultural policy report of the German government declares that mandatory labeling for GE products is exhaustively regulated at EU level. This marks a turnaround in German GE policy since the coalition agreement of the German government in 2013 stated that it will advocate for EU mandatory labeling of products derived from animals fed with GE plants.

General Information:

The new agricultural policy report 2015 of the German Government was adopted by the Cabinet on 20 May 2015. For GE policy, it marks a turnaround of the policy for the labeling of genetically engineered products (GE). In their coalition agreement of 2013, the federal government stated that it will advocate for EU mandatory labeling of products derived from animals fed with GE plants. The current report of the government now declares that mandatory labelling is exhaustively regulated for the moment since there is no adequate support from the European Commission and the Member States.

In its report, the government points to the German voluntary “without gene technology” labeling program instead of the mandatory labelling for GE products. Since the program started numerous entrepreneurs have purchased the license to sell GE-free milk, meat and egg products with the label. The Government also advocates in its reports for the need to continue to do research on GE organisms in Germany. In addition, the Federal Government welcomes the amendment of the European release directive (opt out for cultivation). Its translation into national law is currently being prepared.

The agricultural policy report 2015 resulted in criticism by the Green Party in German Parliament Bundestag. Harald Ebner, the GE policy spokesperson of the Greens, declared that the federal government is cheating the citizens one more time since their majority refuse GE food and in the fields the majority refuse. According to press reports, Agricultural Minister Schmidt has rejected the criticism of the Greens. The phrase "exhaustively regulated" merely describes the current state. In a next step the minister would rather go to the other EU member states trying to organize a majority.

Meanwhile, a group of German scientists launched a campaign to require labeling of anything that contains or has been produced with the help of GE organisms on May 19, 2015. The petition to the German parliament asks the German government to prepare a law that requires GE labeling for all food, feed, drugs, textiles, chemicals, and other products that have been produced using genetic engineering. The petition also calls on the government to advocate a similar law at the E.U. level. If the petition receives more than 50,000 signatures in the next 4 weeks, the German parliament has to consider the proposal.

Please see below for unofficial translation of the biotech chapter of the agricultural policy report 2015:

4.4.2. Green Genetic Engineering

(112) Maize MON810 is currently the only GE crop, which is approved for cultivation in the EU. However MON810 is subject to a national cultivation moratorium so that no GE crops are grown commercially in Germany.

(113) The draft amendment of the Deliberate Release Directive was submitted in 2010. The Directive was adopted after negotiations in the Council and Parliament in the spring of 2015 and entered into force on April 2, 2015. The scheme allows Member to ban or to limit the cultivation of EU-approved genetically modified crops States on their territory or parts thereof, as far as the prohibitions or restrictions are consistent with the EU legislation and as far as the prohibitions and restrictions are proportionate and non-discriminatory and based on compelling reasons. These may not be based on health or environmental risks that have already been evaluated under the EU approval. The German

Government welcomes the so-called opt-out scheme. A translation into national law is currently being prepared.

(114) Mandatory labeling of GE ingredients in food and feed is exhaustively regulated at EU level. Foods that are labeled as "genetically engineered" are only sold sporadically in Germany. EU regulation on labeling for dairy and meat products from animals fed with GE feed currently lacks substantial support from the European Commission and the Member States.

(115) The voluntary Logo "without gene technology" for the labeling of food products was introduced in Germany in 2008, in order to provide more clarity on the use of GE in food production. 141 operators in the food industry have now acquired the license for this logo, which is used mainly for certain dairy and meat products and eggs. There are also labels of GE-free food in some other Member States.

(116) The Federal Government advocates that the framework for public, effective and independent research on GE organisms remains in Germany. This should still guarantee to keep the skills for own chance and risk assessment.

Background Information

Agricultural Policy Report of the German Government

In accordance with § 4 of the Agriculture Act, the Federal Government has to publish a report on the agricultural situation every four years. The report serves as a positioning of the agricultural policy of the German Government, presenting agricultural policy decisions, goals and objectives.

Coalition Agreement of the German Government

The elections in fall 2013 resulted in a grand coalition government between Chancellor Merkel's Christian Democratic Union/ Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) party and the Social Democratic Party (SPD). Their coalition agreement acknowledges the "reservations of the majority of the population towards green biotechnology." The coalition advocates EU mandatory labeling of products derived from animals fed with genetically modified plants (such as U.S. soybeans). The coalition opposes any change to the EU's current 'zero tolerance' policy for EU-unapproved GE crops as well as changes to the seed purity.

For more information please see [Agricultural Biotechnology Report 2014](#).