

New GMOs: EU Commission Serves Big Agribusiness' Interests

By [Friends of the Earth Europe](#)

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The EU Commission’s health division has launched a new public consultation on the new wave of genetically modified plants (new GMOs), moving ahead with far reaching deregulation plans.

With this [consultation](#), the EU Commission is yet again widely following the wish list of some agribusiness lobby groups as nearly all the questions are framed in a way to support the Commission’s deregulation plans. Health Commissioner Stella Kyriakides is tragically giving credit to agribusiness’ false promise that new GMOs – currently in the research pipeline stage – would be a useful tool for the transformation of food systems towards sustainability.

EU GMO safety and labelling laws currently also apply to these new genomic or breeding techniques. Exempting them would keep farmers and consumers in the dark as to whether their crops and food are GMOs or not, and would lead to the release of untested and fossil fuel dependent GMOs into the environment.

Mute Schimpf, food and farming campaigner at Friends of the Earth Europe said:

“The debate on the deregulation of new GMO is a flagrant attempt to divert time, money and attention away from truly sustainable and already-proven solutions like agroecology. We don’t have time to waste with empty and dangerous promises that would only have us more dependent on dirty fossil fuels. Our message to the Commission is clear: stop pushing for the deregulation of new GMOs and keep them strictly labelled and safety checked.”

Friends of the Earth Europe assessed the content presented in the new consultation launched by the Commission.

What is positive:

- The European Commission asks if the new generation of GMOs should be kept under the current legal framework for GMOs, meaning that labelling, pre-market authorisation and safety checks would still be applied to them. This is what more than 69.000 citizens demanded during [the 4-week consultation](#) that took place last autumn.

Examples of the agribusiness spin on the consultation:

- The Commission asks which new GMO traits are most relevant for contributing to sustainability, but these new GM plants are still in the research pipeline. How is it possible to assess the sustainability of a plant that doesn't exist yet?
 - What it should have done: Make its communication and consultation evidence based. Sustainability claims on new GMOs are based on promised by big biotech developers, but various products in the research pipeline have never materialised. In the case they would be ready for marketing, they can still fail to meet farmers' interests.
 - Why it's wrong: Farming practices such as agroecology and organic present long term evidence of contributing to a drastic pesticide and GHG emission cut, [building crop resilience and stabilising yields](#). These are the farming systems that will help achieve the goals of the of Farm to Fork Strategy.
- The EU Commission asks if the (claimed) sustainability of new GM plants should be used for food labelling. However, there is no EU wide definition yet of what constitutes sustainable food systems and GM plants are in any case part of a highly industrial way of farming.
 - What it should have done: Again, it should have make its consultation evidence based and it should not prejudge the outcomes of other [legislative processes on sustainable food systems](#).
 - Why it's wrong: One plant characteristic cannot make a food system sustainable. Sustainable food systems require a holistic approach taking into account climate resilience, biodiversity benefits and local adaptation. This goes against two decades of records showing pesticide increase linked to GMOs.
- The EU Commission claims that certain new GMO plants are as safe as conventionally- bred plants.
 - What it should have done: Ask what new risks for the environment and human health can occur from new GMOs.
 - Why it's wrong: Such impacts should be assessed in this type of consultation as described in the [Commission's own toolbox](#) (the Better Regulation toolbox set standards for consultation and Impact Assessment for Commission staff, such as tool 16 identifying policy option, tool 32 assessing health impacts, tool 36 assessing environmental impact).

Next steps:

- The Consultation runs until 22 July 2022 and is the main tool for stakeholders to feed in their input.

- In parallel, meetings with national officials are planned in May 2022.
- The Consultation is also expected to be discussed among farm or environment ministers in an upcoming Council meeting.
- The EU Commission will finalise the Impact Assessment report by the end of the year.
- If accepted by the EU Commission, a new draft law for deregulating new GMO plants is to be published by summer 2023.

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