

BERLIN DECLARATION 2018

At their joint 9th European Conference of GMO-Free Regions in Berlin on the 7th of September 2018 the network adopted the following declaration:

Continue with the precautionary approach to GMOs

Keeping most of the European member states and regions - with very few exceptions - free of the cultivation of genetically modified organisms (GMO) during the last few decades has proven to be of substantial advantage for European farmers as well as for biodiversity and soil fertility. Consumers are confident of the non-GMO quality of their products. Voluntary non-GMO labelling of animal products, which were produced without the use of genetically modified feed ingredients, has risen steadily in the European market. This development would be facilitated further by the introduction of common standards for traceability and labelling for the EU market as a whole.

Additionally, the non-GMO labelling has led to an increased demand for regionally produced non-GMO protein plants, which show a diversity of benefits for regional economies, crop rotation and soil fertility. The concept of GMO-Free Regions has proven to be a success story. This is also reflected in the constant rise of the numbers of European regions participating in the Network of GMO-Free Regions. The regional collaboration with farmers' organisations, businesses and NGOs along the entire agricultural and food value chain constitutes a strong and solid foundation for this regional movement, which encompasses a very broad spectrum of different political actors and parties.

Recent technical developments in the field of 'gene editing', allowing for the alteration of the genome of plants and animals (as well as humans), have called the applicability of the current regulatory framework into question. We welcome the recent clarification regarding these matters by the European Court of Justice (ECJ, C-528/16). We want to emphasize that - in line with the ruling by the ECJ - the regulation of all GMOs and methods for genetic engineering are subject to precautionary risk assessment and transparent approval procedures as well as labelling and traceability obligations under GMO legislation.

Organisms produced with new genetic engineering techniques are therefore clearly GMOs and have to be labelled as such within the European Union. In many countries outside the EU, the legal status of such GMOs is unclear and it is of vital interest to the European GMO-Free Regions Network to ensure that imports from such countries are free of such GMOs or are authorised and clearly labelled. To ensure this task is met, the Network calls for a public international register of all worldwide released GMOs. The existing registry of the Biosafety Clearing House, created as part of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), is an appropriate framework for this task.

Members of the GMO-Free Regions Network would specifically like to express their strong reservations concerning so-called “Gene Drive” applications aiming to alter the genetic properties of whole populations of plants and animals. We are committed to prevent the introduction of “Gene Drives” into our environments. We also call upon national governments and the European Union to commit themselves to enact a moratorium on such “Gene Drives” on their territories. We also call upon them to initiate and promote such a moratorium on the international level, namely in the context of the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD) and within the framework of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

Considering the substantial concentration of market and research power in the seed and agrochemical business over the past decades, we see a need to increase the public engagement in maintaining and developing non-GM seed breeding, research and agricultural methods. Germ plasm of all plants and animals should be kept in the public domain and be maintained as one of the most valuable public goods of humankind. Public investment in agricultural research and development should guarantee that the whole range of options needed to address present and future challenges to agriculture; food production and resource management continue to remain at public disposal. We commit to contribute to a renaissance of public research and the development of public goods for future generations.

Berlin, 7th of September 2018

<https://gmofree-eu-network.hessen.de>