

# SAFEGUARDS

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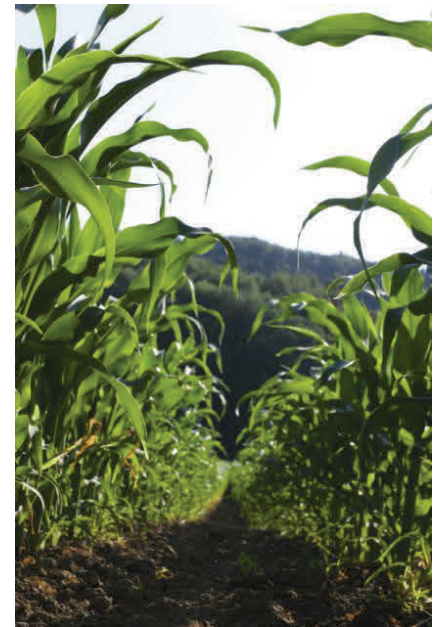
## EU MOVES STEP CLOSER TO LAW ON NATIONAL GMO CROP BANS

On Tuesday 11 November 2014, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) have voted to allow member nations to ban genetically modified (GM) crops from their soil, even if they are given approval to be grown within the European Union.

GM crops, widely grown in the Americas and Asia, have long divided opinion amongst European Union (EU) member states. MEPs on the parliament's Environmental Committee backed a plan that will allow member states to ban GM crops on environmental grounds. This raises the prospect that the use of GM will remain limited on the continent. In a statement, the executive European Commission said it was confident the law could be in place in 2015, once it had received final endorsement from the European Parliament and member states.

GM cultivation has provoked opposition in Europe for years. An earlier attempt to agree a compromise on GM cultivation failed in 2012, when EU ministers were unable to agree. To date, only two GM crops have been approved for commercial cultivation within the EU, one of which was later blocked by a court. Monsanto's GM maize MON810 is the only GM crop grown in Europe, and has been cultivated in Spain and Portugal for a decade.

The text approved on 11 November would entitle member states to pass legally binding acts restricting or prohibiting the cultivation of GMO crops after they have been authorised at EU level. They could also ask when a new GMO crop is being assessed at EU level, to adjust the geographical scope of the authorisation. Bans could be founded upon, inter alia, the aims of environmental policy, town and country planning, land use, agricultural policy, public policy, or possible socio-economic impacts. Further possible grounds should include preventing GMO contamination of other products, persistent scientific uncertainty, the development of pesticide resistance amongst weeds and pests, invasiveness, the persistence of a GMO variety in the environment, or a lack of data on the potential negative impacts of a variety, MEPs say.



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Case-by-case risk assessments to be carried out by the European Food Safety Authority should take account of the direct, indirect, immediate, delayed and cumulative effects of GMOs on human health and the environment, and always take account of the precautionary principle, MEPs say.

Member states should also ensure that GMO crops do not contaminate other products, and particular attention should be paid to preventing cross-border contamination, for instance by implementing "buffer zones" with neighbouring countries, MEPs say.

The committee's second reading recommendation was approved by 53 votes to 11 with 2 abstentions. The committee also voted for the opening of negotiations (57 votes to 5 with 4 abstentions) with the Italian Presidency of the Council, which will start today. "This vote shows we have secured a broad consensus between the political groups in the European Parliament on this sensitive issue," said Frédérique Ries (ALDE, BE) who is steering the legislation through Parliament. "The measures approved today will secure flexibility for member states to restrict, ban the cultivation of GMO crops if they so wish. At the same time, we have secured a clear process for the authorisation of GMOs at EU level, with improved safeguards and a key role for the European Food Safety Authority, which is important for us," she added.

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