

Declaration by the Farmers Biotech Network (FBN)

Farmers Call Upon Europe's Leaders to Invest in Green Biotechnology Agriculture

The Farmers Biotech Network is a grouping of European farmers who:

- see positive benefits in agricultural biotechnology (GM crops);
- believe EU agriculture needs all the scientific tools available, including GM technology, to address the emerging challenges of food security, climate change, biofuels and environmental protection;
- support science-based, case-by-case regulation of GM technology;
- are concerned that the EU is falling behind other regions, when it should be leading developments;
- want to see equal access to the technology to compete on a level playing-field with producers elsewhere.

We, farmers from all over Europe, demand the freedom of choice between traditional, organic and green biotechnology agriculture. Farmers must have access to the technological tools to deal with the sustainable food production challenges Europe faces. We call upon the EU Commission and the European Parliament to allow us to become more competitive and more sustainable. National governments must also provide significant political and public support to strengthen our ability to meet current and future expectations of farm productivity.

Innovation is essential to support competitive EU agriculture - We live in a time of unprecedented global challenges, with many farmers hit by falling output prices, and high input prices (fertiliser, energy and other inputs). The EU must help farmers remain competitive and feed Europeans at reasonable prices. The EU should support - not block - access to innovation, including green biotechnology, which has been successfully used for over a decade in other regions.

GM crops offer major production and environmental benefits - A recent report¹ demonstrated that GM soybean, maize and cotton production was 20%, 7%, and 15% higher, respectively, than with non-GM varieties. Higher yields mean less land needed to produce food. GM-crops can also mean fewer pesticide sprays and less greenhouse gas emissions because they often require less tillage, so reducing fuel use and soil carbon release.

EU farmers can manage the co-existence of GM and non GM-crops - Farmers in some EU countries - Germany, Spain, Czech Republic, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Portugal - have been able to experience the benefits of green biotechnology and have first hand experience of managing coexistence between GM- and non-GM-crops.

EU agriculture is falling behind other parts of the world - Dozens of reports from respected EU and national public bodies attest to the safety and usefulness of biotech plants. In 2008, 13.3 million farmers worldwide planted 125 million hectares of biotech plants in 25 countries². How long will Europe's leaders deny us the ability to do the same?

Many European farmers are still not allowed to grow biotech varieties; at best, access is limited to the single green biotech crop authorized in the EU. This hypocritical situation means that Europeans are importing more and more GMOs from outside the EU, our farmers are losing their global competitiveness and we are less and less able to meet the new demands for environmental sustainability for farming. That makes neither environmental nor economic sense.

We therefore call upon EU and national leaders to take the following urgent measures:

- Defend in all European countries the principle of freedom for farmers to choose their own crops.
- End immediately the GM bans in across Europe which are justified neither by science nor by law.
- Accelerate the processing and approval of GM applications in the European Union and give us access to the tools that farmers in much of the rest of the world have had for years.
- Ensure a real and open debate about the future of agriculture policy for Europe which is based on scientific and economic reality, not on political posturing, and does not ignore the critical role plant biotechnology could play.

Europe has always been a powerhouse of agriculture – with the environmental and economic crisis, the change in the EU institutions gives Europe a unique opportunity to re-align policy in favour of sustainable, competitive agriculture which does not turn its back on innovation and technology at a time when they are sorely needed. We urge the new generation of European leaders: invest in the future of our agriculture and allow us the tools to do our jobs.

¹ Focus on yield - Biotech crops; evidence, outcomes and impacts 1996-2006, PG Economics, 2008

² ISAAA brief Global Status of Commercialized Biotech/GM Crops 2008, A level playing-field - let EU farmers grow what we import