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Novel foods, MEPs set new rules

Press release

In a legislative report dealing with an update of the EU rules on novel foods, the European Parliament calls on the Commission to interdict the placing on the market of food derived from cloned animals and their descendants. MEPs also want food being produced by nanotechnology processes to undergo a specific risk assessment before being approved for use and be labelled. The report was adopted with 658 votes in favour, 15 against and 11 abstentions.

The Commission's proposal to update the regulation on novel foods aims at simplifying and centralising the procedure of authorisation of these products, ensuring food safety and human health. Only novel food which is included on the Community list (after assessment by the European Food Safety Authority), can be placed on the market.

Novel foods are defined as those which have not been consumed to any significant degree in the EU before May 1997, when the first legislation on novel foods was established. These can be newly developed products, such as foods produced by new production processes like nanotechnology, but also food that has been consumed traditionally in third countries, outside the EU. So far, more than 20 novel foods have been authorised for use in the EU, such as "noni juice" (made from a Tahitian plant) and products derived from new production processes such as "salatrim" (a reduced-energy fat) and DHA-rich oil (a high-pressure fruit juice).

MEPs in general support the proposal but have adopted amendments, concerning food derived from cloned animals and produced with the aid of nanotechnology, aiming to achieve, not only a high level of food safety, but also consumer, environmental and animal health protection, based on the precautionary principle.

Food derived from cloned animals to be excluded - new Commission proposal demanded

The Parliament wants to exclude food derived from cloned animals from the scope of this Regulation. MEPs ask the Commission to present a legislative proposal to prohibit the placing on the market of food derived from cloned animals and their offspring.

Food produced with nanotechnology processes must be safe and labelled

MEPs want that foods which have been produced by nanotechnology processes, and which will need specific risk assessment methods, may not be included in the Community list until those risk assessment methods have been approved for use.

The risk assessment methods must not imply the use of vertebrate animals; underline the MEPs, who also support the use of non-animal tests and the intelligent testing strategies.

Furthermore, all ingredients present in the form of nanomaterials shall be clearly indicated in the list of ingredients. The names of the ingredients shall be followed by the word 'nano' in brackets.

Press release

A definition of nanomaterials shall be included in the regulation: "nanomaterial means an intentionally manufactured material with one or more external dimensions or an internal structure, of order of 100 nm or less" says the text.

Ethical demands

In order to entering a food on the Community list of the novel foods accepted in the EU, MEPs consider that the opinion of the European Group on Ethics in Science and New Technologies shall be sought when necessary, regarding ethical and environment aspects.

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