



THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Luxembourg Environment Minister Carole Dieschbourg voiced concerns with the draft cultivation proposal.

European nations back new rules for snubbing GM crops

By [Tania Rabesandratana \(/author/tania-rabesandratana\)](#)

Thursday, June 12, 2014 - 5:15pm

Angering both sides of a fractious debate, the European Union's member states [agreed today](#)

http://consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/envir/143178.pdf

on a plan allowing individual countries to refuse to plant E.U.-sanctioned

genetically modified (GM) crops.

Many European consumers and national governments have voiced strong concerns about GM foods, with [sharp divisions across the bloc hampering regulatory decisions \(http://news.sciencemag.org/environment/2013/11/after-12-year-limbo-new-gm-maize-may-hit-europes-fields\)](http://news.sciencemag.org/environment/2013/11/after-12-year-limbo-new-gm-maize-may-hit-europes-fields). “The current system for approving GM crops doesn't work, either for those who wish to cultivate GM crops or for those who don't,” said Rupert Ponsonby, U.K. parliamentary undersecretary of state for natural environment and science, at a meeting of the Council of the European Union environment ministers in Luxembourg today.

To avoid lengthy deadlocks, the European Commission proposed in 2010 to let individual member states ban a given crop on their territory, while the commission would still grant pan-European marketing approvals based on the European Food Safety Authority's scientific opinion. That proposal, which had been stalled by disagreements among member states, was [revived earlier this year when states debated approval of an unpopular GM maize line \(http://news.sciencemag.org/environment/2014/02/cultivation-unpopular-gm-maize-europe-hangs-balance\)](http://news.sciencemag.org/environment/2014/02/cultivation-unpopular-gm-maize-europe-hangs-balance). Out of 28 member states, 26 agreed on this “cultivation proposal” today as a practical compromise.

Under current rules, member states wishing to ban specific GM crops must present fresh scientific evidence that the crops pose a risk to human health or the environment. France, for one, [ran into \(http://news.sciencemag.org/europe/2011/11/french-ban-genetically-modified-corn-loses-another-round\)](http://news.sciencemag.org/europe/2011/11/french-ban-genetically-modified-corn-loses-another-round) opposition [from seed producers and lost court battles in recent years when it tried to prohibit cultivation of Monsanto's maize line MON810 this way.](http://news.sciencemag.org/europe/2011/11/french-ban-genetically-modified-corn-loses-another-round)

The cultivation proposal as it stands “would still leave those countries that want to say ‘no’ to GMOs exposed to legal attacks of the biotech industry,” said [Marco Contiero, agriculture policy director at Greenpeace EU in a statement today \(http://www.greenpeace.org/eu-unit/en/News/2014/Member-states-agree-on-right-to-ban-GMO-cultivation-at-national-level/\)](http://www.greenpeace.org/eu-unit/en/News/2014/Member-states-agree-on-right-to-ban-GMO-cultivation-at-national-level/).

Under the proposal, member states could opt out before or after cultivation approval is granted. After approval, [they could ban a GM crop from their land for national planning or socio](#)

http://ec.europa.eu/food/plant/gmo/legislation/future_rules_en.htm

[economic reasons, for example](#)

http://ec.europa.eu/food/plant/gmo/legislation/future_rules_en.htm .

Businesses are concerned that this will set a “very bad precedent,” says Beat Späth, director for agricultural biotechnology at the industry association EuropaBio in Brussels. “It's quite worrying to our industry that products can now be banned based on soft, unpredictable reasons.”

In the coming months, Europe’s Council of Ministers must agree on a joint version of the plan with the [incoming European Parliament](#) (<http://news.sciencemag.org/europe/2014/05/euroskeptic-surge-rocks-e-u-elections>) before the final text can be adopted, possibly next year. Corinne Lepage, the French parliamentarian who put together the outgoing Parliament's position on this issue, has slammed today's decision as a “third-rate agreement.” “The Council's text does not give any solid legal basis to really prohibit the cultivation of GMOs, and gives biotechnology companies an exorbitant weight in the decision-making process,” Lepage said in a [statement before the vote](#) (<http://www.corinnelepage.eu/cp-corinne-lepage-denonce-un-accord-europeen-au-rabais-sur-les-ogm/>) .

Posted in [Environment \(/category/environment\)](/category/environment) , [Europe \(/category/europe\)](/category/europe) , [Policy \(/category/policy\)](/category/policy)
