

CHRONOLOGY

April 1990

EU legislation (Directive 90/220) on the regulatory approval of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) was adopted.

1994 to 1998

The commercial release of 18 GMOs (9 crop products) was authorized in the EU through the regulatory approval system.

In 1997, some member states began to ban the placing on the market of GM products already approved at the EU level in their countries.

October 1998 to present

No further authorizations have been granted and there are currently 12 applications pending, including 6 varieties of canola grown commercially in Canada.

June 1999

Ministers from Denmark, France, Greece, Italy and Luxembourg issued a joint statement that they would suspend new authorizations pending EU adoption of GMO labelling and traceability regulations.

The Austrian, Belgian, Finnish, German, Netherlands and Swedish delegations issued a statement emphasizing the need to “take a thoroughly precautionary approach” to new authorizations.

These declarations formalized the de facto moratorium on GMO approvals that had been in place since 1998.

March 2000

The EU’s highest court (European Court of Justice) stated that France did not have the right in 1998 to suspend approval of three GM maize strains already cleared at the EU level.

July 2000

The EU Environment Council supported the continuation of the moratorium until such time as the Commission had prepared proposals on traceability and labelling. The Commission made assurances to the U.S. that proposals would appear before the end of year and that the moratorium would be lifted.

July 2001

After much delay, the European Commission (EC) adopted proposals for regulations on the traceability and labelling of GMOs, and assured the U.S. that the approval process would be restarted promptly.

October 2001

Member states rejected the Commission's proposal for the lifting of the moratorium. Eight member states—Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Sweden—declared that traceability and labelling rules must be implemented before approvals would be granted.

October 2002

Directive 2001/18/EC came into effect, repealing Directive 90/220/EEC and strengthening the existing rules of the risk assessment and approval process. Of particular note, it introduced rules for mandatory information to the public, mandatory labelling and traceability, and post-market monitoring.

The European Commission had previously stated that the adoption of this new directive would prompt member states to lift the moratorium, but they would still not agree to the approval of GMOs until the EC labelling and traceability regulations are in place.

The EC acknowledged that there was no legal basis for the protracted moratorium and that, according to European Commission spokeswoman Pia Ahrenkilde, "We consider there is no legal basis for the moratorium. It is a political problem." As well, the EC admitted that these regulations were not based on food safety or public health concerns, as stated by Commissioner for Health and Consumer Safety David Byrne: "This is not a public health issue; this is a consumer choice issue."

December 2002

The European Agriculture and Environment Councils reached agreement on traceability and labelling proposals. The Danish delegation declared that the moratorium should remain in place until the EU implemented environmental liability legislation for biotech products. Commissioner Margot Wallström said that some member states "will probably take every chance to move the goal posts and find another obstacle."

January 2003

At an Agriculture/Food Safety Council meeting, nine member states (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg and Sweden) demanded that no biotech seeds be approved for planting until legislation regarding co-existence of biotech and non-biotech crops is in force.

March 2003

Commissioner Wallström told the Environment Council that the regulatory committee charged with considering applications under Directive 2001/18 would not meet until October 2003 at the earliest.

Since June 1997

Canada has made a number of high-level representations bilaterally and in the WTO regarding the moratorium. The Prime Minister has raised the issue with the EU at several Canada-EU Summits. As well, Ministers Pettigrew and Vanclief have raised the issue on a number of occasions.