

NGT regulation is a real threat to consumer protection and organic food production

SAFE regrets the approval by the European Parliament of the compromise on New Genomic Techniques (NGTs), disregarding key safeguards contained in the compromise amendments presented by a group of MEPs at the plenary — amendments 1 to 37.

These addressed SAFE’s main concerns about the labelling and traceability of NGT1 plants, securing full transparency through labelling, a publicly available database, and detection methods to prevent this category of genetically modified organisms from being invisible to producers and consumers. The tabled amendments also contained strong safeguards on patents to protect farmers from liability for naturally occurring genetic traits. All of these were finally dismissed by the ENVI Committee of the European Parliament.

Deputy Director Luigi Tozzi said: "NGTs are GMOs, even if the European Parliament has changed their name. This new regulation will create an entire category of invisible and undetectable NGT plants and plant products — the so-called Category 1 NGTs—, based on an arbitrary distinction, with no labelling or traceability requirements whatsoever. For consumers who wish to eat GMO-free food, it will be impossible to identify products that do not contain NGTs, thereby limiting their freedom of choice. For producers, such as organic farmers, it will be impossible to protect themselves against contamination from these new GMOs, putting their entire business model at risk."

Tozzi added: "This is very sad news, especially in countries such as Italy, where the application of Article 28 of Regulation (EU) 2018/848 on organic production is more stringent, ensuring that certified organic products remain free from accidental contamination. These are issues that we have consistently raised with Members of the European Parliament. I wonder why parliamentarians, particularly the Italian ones, voted this way."

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Throughout the negotiation process of this legislation, SAFE has consistently called for the compulsory labelling of all NGT plants and products, including both categories 1 and 2, and for safeguards ensuring the technical traceability of all NGTs, as is the case in the old GMO legislation, allowing operators wishing to maintain NGT-free supply chains to do so.

In early May, more than 350 companies from the organic food sector and from all levels of the food chain, including German REWE Group, EcorNaturaSi from Italy, and Odin from the Netherlands supported this same position. The European Union's organic food sector is valued at €50 billion.