

Enlargement, International Collaboration & Capacity Building

International Workshop on Harmonisation of GMO Detection and Analysis

Foz do Iguaçu (Brasil), 4-5 December 2009

<http://mbg.jrc.ec.europa.eu/capacitybuilding/>



Aim of the workshop

The use of GMOs, their release into the environment, their cultivation, import and, in particular, their utilisation as food, food ingredients and animal feed, is regulated in the European Union by a harmonised legislation [e.g. Directive 2001/18/EC; Regulation (EC) No 1829/2003].

The key elements of the EU legislation are the safety assessments as part of the authorisation procedure and the GM food and feed labelling provisions to guarantee the consumers' freedom of choice whilst ensuring a high level of protection to human and animal health, the environment and the effective functioning of internal markets.

A key technical element for the implementation of European legislation is the availability of analytical tools allowing the control and the monitoring of GM events on the market. In this context the Molecular Biology and Genomics Unit - nominated as the Community Reference Laboratory for GM food and feed (CRL-GMFF) - is validating each individual event-specific detection method to provide control laboratories with appropriate analytical tools.

Among other responsibilities, the CRL is requested to conduct initial and further training courses for the benefit of staff from national reference laboratories and experts from developing countries; and to collaborate with laboratories responsible for analysing food and feed in third countries [Regulation (EC) No 882/2004].

In Europe a very high level of harmonisation has already been achieved as a result of the formation of the European Network of GMO Laboratories (ENGL), initiated 10 years ago as a consequence of the lack of coordination in the field of GMO analysis around Europe. The ENGL operates according to Annex I of Regulation (EC) No 1829/2003 and is the centre of information among European Member States.

The importance of communication and collaboration in achieving better harmonization in GMO analysis has been often highlighted in the frame of the activities performed by the Molecular Biology and Genomics Unit of the European Commission JRC, notably during the First Global Conference on GMO Analysis organised in June 2008. This in particular, allowed an intense debate with EU and non-EU colleagues on the need for international collaboration, cooperation and capacity building. Many participants highlighted the need to share expertise and to interact intensively on technical issues related to GMO testing; specific requests included further training support and the wish to participate in the ENGL network.

In this global context, the workshop aims at responding to the needs frequently raised on this matter and at constituting a starting point for fruitful exchange of information in relation to the complex work of GMO testing. The different aspects of the GMO analysis process, the various tools used and the technical difficulties still associated with them will be addressed. The EU picture in relation to the legal framework on GMOs, and the current situation in relation to analytical methods will be illustrated. The experiences derived from the implementation of the ENGL in Europe will be shared with representatives from the different countries. In addition, regional experiences and examples will provide ground for discussion and will allow us to address and focus on the elements required for further collaboration.

The hope is that this workshop will help in identifying priorities for the Region and in reaching agreement on a joint strategy that will result in strengthened cooperation but – even more important – in improved international harmonisation in GMO analysis.

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