

# Norwegian Agriculture Attitude to Gene Technology and Genetically Modified Organisms



# Gene Technology and genetically modified Organisms in Agriculture



In 1997, Norwegian Agriculture Organizations (hereafter NAOs) agreed upon a common attitude to the application of gene technology and genetically modified organisms. This consensus resulted in a policy document that all the organizations pledged support. In 2004, The Federation of Norwegian Agricultural Co-operatives re-evaluated this policy in light of new and emerging issues and challenges related to the application of gene technology and genetically modified organisms for Norwegian agriculture. Based on this evaluation, a revised policy document (2005) was completed and endorsed by the following organizations:

- > TINE BA
- > Nortura BA
- > Norwegian agricultural purchasing and marketing Co-op
- > The Norwegian Forest Owners' Federation
- > A.L Gartnerhallen
- > HOFF Norske potetindustrier
- > Norwegian Fur Breeders' Association
- > GENO
- > Norsvin
- > Honningcentralen
- > Norwegian Association of Sheep and Goat Farmers
- > Norwegian Farmers' Union
- > Norwegian Farmers and Smallholders Union

# The overall Aim



The overall aim of the NAO is to manage and utilise the nature in ways that contribute sustainable development. This requires production that secures food quality and health. Within this premise, the agricultural sector should produce food and other products efficiently and rationally that contributes to the health of the agriculture and consumers.

## Criteria for the evaluation of genetic modification

Given the overall aim, the use of gene technology and genetically modified organisms are therefore to be evaluated on the basis of:

- > Food quality and health
- > Environment and sustainable development
- > Ethics and precautionary principle
- > Societal needs
- > Consumers' wishes and expectations

# The main View of the NAO



## An Attitude of Precaution

The NAO confirms its precautionous attitude to the application of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in food production. It is a precautionary approach and should not be taken as a definitive “no” to the application of gene technology. Gene technology is already today a tool used for breeding and product analysis that contributes positively to agriculture and food industry. Our concerns apply to the use of the technology to modify genetic material in the food production.

Genetic modification differs from traditional animal and plant breeding in two ways. First, nature's own borders for out crossing between different species are removed. Second, it makes it possible to develop and multiply new organisms at increased speed. In practical terms, it can be difficult to discover and prevent unexpected negative impacts from genetically modified organisms only after large scale commercial application.

## Transparency, Information and Labelling

The NAO wants open information regarding where and how gene technology, genetic modification and genetically modified organisms are applied in agriculture and food industry. Labelling and information of feed and agricultural products produced by gene modification should take place in such a way that secures farmers' and consumers' right to information and choice.

## The Need for more Knowledge

The NAO wants to emphasise the need for more knowledge regarding long term consequences of genetic modification and genetically modified organisms on the environment and human health. It is of crucial importance that the national authorities secure funding to interdisciplinary and independent research in this field.

## The Right to say No

Norway is committed to the Cartagena protocol which regulates international trade with living genetically modified organisms. The NAO supports the principle stated in this agreement, which gives all countries the right to deny import of genetically modified organism out of environmental and human health concerns in line with the precautionary principle.

# Attitudes to concrete Applications



The NAOs attitude to current, concrete applications of gene technology, genetic modification and genetically modified organisms is based on existing products, techniques and knowledge. The development in this field takes place at high speed. Therefore, it is necessary to continually evaluate new knowledge to assess risk.

An approval for the use of genetic modification or products based on such techniques, presupposes that a thorough case by case evaluation is conducted.

## **Genetically modified domestic animals in food production**

The NAO does not take part in the development of, or use, genetically modified domestic animals in food production.

## **Cultivation of genetically modified plants**

The NAO chooses not to cultivate genetically modified plants for food or feed.

## Genetically modified plants in feed for domestic animals

Norwegian agriculture is dependent upon the import of some plants as protein sources for animal feed. An increasing amount of plants on the global market are genetically modified. Principally, the NAO opposes the use of genetically modified raw materials in feed. For this reason it is desirable to avoid the use of such raw materials as long as it is practical and economical justifiable. The NAO does not under any conditions use plant material that contains genes coding for antibiotic resistance in animal feed.

## Use of medicines, food or additives, enzymes and other products produced in contained industrial processes

The NAO accepts the use of genetically modified organisms in contained industrial processes. This presupposes that thorough requirements of safety testing are in place. The production takes place with the use of genetically modified organisms, but the end product does not contain genetic material from the actual organism. The use of products produced by these means can be accepted in food and foodstuffs industry after a concrete case to case evaluation by the market place actors.

## The use of gene technology as a tool for research and animal and plant breeding

The NAO has already, and continues to, apply gene technology as a tool for genetic mapping of traits for selective breeding. Gene technology can further beneficially be used for analysis, diagnosis of diseases and developments of medicines and vaccines or similar products.

# Coordination of Decisions



Today, December 2005, no genetically modified products are produced in Norwegian agriculture. To decide upon potential future use, the NAO has established joint decision procedures. Under this agreement, any agricultural associations considering the use of genetic modifications or products from such techniques must first consult and discuss with other associations in the NAO before decision can be taken.

Each individual agricultural organization has agreed to establish reporting routines and means to secure that the NAO and agricultural based food industries follows the guidelines described in this document.



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