



**STELLA KYRIAKIDES**  
MEMBER OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY

Rue de la Loi, 200  
B-1049 Brussels – Berl 10/380  
[stella.kyriakides@ec.europa.eu](mailto:stella.kyriakides@ec.europa.eu)

Brussels, 19 September 2022

Dear Honourable Members,

I would like to thank you for your letter of 20 July 2022 addressed to Executive Vice-President Timmermans, Commissioners Wojciechowski and Sinkevičius and myself, expressing your views on our on-going policy initiative on legislation for plants obtained by certain new genomic techniques. Executive Vice-President and Commissioners Wojciechowski and Sinkevičius have asked me to reply also on their behalf.

I have carefully read your letter and thank you for sharing your views at this early stage on several issues related to our policy initiative. In particular, I took note of the basic principles that you consider applicable at all times.

I also noted your concerns about the introduction of separate legislation for products of new genomic techniques. It would be important in this context to recall that the Council requested the Commission to submit a proposal accompanied by an impact assessment, if appropriate, as a followup to the Commission's 2021 study on new genomic techniques under Union law<sup>1</sup>, or otherwise to inform the Council on other measures required as a follow-up to the study.

That is why we have initiated action in this field. Furthermore, our study on new genomic techniques that was supported by expert work, including a report of the Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC) on current and future products under development<sup>2</sup>, showed that the ongoing activities cover a broad range of plants and traits. This range goes beyond what has been seen with transgenic GMOs so far. JRC found that these techniques are being used to develop plants that are resistant to pests and thus needing less chemical pesticides.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://food.ec.europa.eu/plants/genetically-modified-organisms/new-techniques-biotechnology/ec-study-new-genomic-techniques\\_en](https://food.ec.europa.eu/plants/genetically-modified-organisms/new-techniques-biotechnology/ec-study-new-genomic-techniques_en)

<sup>2</sup> <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC123830>

**MEP Mr. Philippe Lamberts**  
Co-president of the Greens/EFA  
European Parliament  
Bdg. ALTIERO SPINELLI  
60 Rue Wiertz  
B-1047 Bruxelles

Indeed, biotic stress was the trait most pursued followed by modifying nutritional composition and improved plant yields. For example, tomatoes and potatoes are being developed that are resistant to fungal pathogens and therefore needing less fungicides during growth. Other traits in development help plants to adapt to the climate change such as rice resistant to drought or salty soils.

A possible new legal framework would have to provide a way to steer the development of products with traits that provide clear benefits to society, in particular through enhanced sustainability. This is one of the major goals of the initiative. The on-going challenges for global food insecurity, together with our common efforts to address climate change and biodiversity loss, underline the vital importance to consider the need for establishing an appropriate regulatory framework for new genomic techniques as a contribution to address these challenges.

The Commission, and my services in particular, have been actively engaging with stakeholders, the European Parliament and the Member States to discuss the ongoing initiative, to assess what is the optimal regulatory framework for these techniques, how to reap their benefits and how to address concerns as also expressed in your letter.

We count on a continued open, inclusive and constructive debate in the coming months to accompany the preparation of a possible legislative proposal.

Yours sincerely,

