

28 October 2015

## Response to the Food Standards Agency call for views on the European Commission proposal on GM food and feed

The Royal Society welcomes the opportunity to comment on the European Commission proposal on GM food and feed. The Society is the UK's national academy of science. It is a self-governing Fellowship of many of the world's most distinguished scientists working across a broad range of disciplines in academia, industry, charities and the public sector. The Society draws on the expertise of the Fellowship to provide independent and authoritative scientific advice to UK, European and international decision makers.

The Commission proposes to amend the Regulation governing GM food and feed to enable all member states to restrict or ban the use of EU-authorized GM food and feed products for non-safety reasons within their territory. The Society is concerned that if the rationale for such bans is not clearly communicated, it may cast doubt on the independent safety assessment conducted by the European Food Safety Authority. It is important that the public can have confidence in the regulatory processes in place to protect their safety.

There is considerable public concern over the use of GM food and feed, particularly around the safety of these products in the food chain. The 2014 *Public Attitudes to Science* survey<sup>1</sup> found that most people do not feel informed about genetically modified (GM) crops and a sizable minority (28%) say the risks outweigh the benefits for GM crops. However the science demonstrates that these techniques are not inherently any more risky than conventional breeding approaches used to produce crops. There are also robust regulatory processes in place to assess the safety of GM crops and approve those that can be used for cultivation, food and feed.

These findings suggest that the science around the production of GM food and feed needs to be better communicated so that people are able to feel informed. Recognising this, the Society is planning to produce a Q&A on genetically modified crops to help members of the public to make up their own minds about this process. These findings also demonstrate the importance of a well-communicated regulatory process that people can trust. Awareness might valuably be raised about the current regulatory processes governing the use of GM food and feed and, should a member state choose to implement a ban, the reasons for this should be clearly communicated. Given that GM food and feed is in common usage, it is unlikely that Member States will seek to ban the use of all GM food and feed in their territory. Without thorough communication, any bans of individual, authorised GM products risk raising public concern over all authorised GM food and feed, damaging trust in the regulatory process.

Further to this, it is important that the public and experts are able to input into decisions over the use of GM food and feed. The same survey of public attitudes shows that eight-in-ten people feel that no food producing techniques and technologies that might raise world food production should be rejected out of hand. This demonstrates that it is important to ensure that the current regulatory framework and potential future decisions over whether to implement bans are informed by public consultation and debate.

For further information, please contact Becky Purvis, Head of Public Affairs on 020 7451 2261 or [becky.purvis@royalsociety.org](mailto:becky.purvis@royalsociety.org)

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<sup>1</sup> Ipsos MORI 2014 *Public attitudes to science*