Procedure file

Basic information

INI - Own-initiative procedure	1996/2232(INI)	Procedure completed
The impact of biotechnology in agriculture Subject 3.10.09.04 Organic farming		

Key players

European Parliament	Committee responsible	Rapporteur	Appointed
	AGRI Agriculture and Rural Development		16/04/1996
		PPE KEPPELHOFF-WIECHERT Hedwig	

Key events

15/11/1996	Committee referral announced in Parliament		
02/02/1998	Vote in committee		Summary
02/02/1998	Committee report tabled for plenary	A4-0037/1998	
19/02/1998	Debate in Parliament		
19/02/1998	Decision by Parliament	T4-0095/1998	Summary
19/02/1998	End of procedure in Parliament		
16/03/1998	Final act published in Official Journal		

Technical information

Procedure reference	1996/2232(INI)
Procedure type	INI - Own-initiative procedure
Procedure subtype	Initiative
Legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP 54
Stage reached in procedure	Procedure completed
Committee dossier	AGRI/4/08413

Documentation gateway

Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading		A4-0037/1998	02/02/1998	EP	

		OJ C 080 16.03.1998, p. 0004			
Text adopted by Parliament, single reading		T4-0095/1998 OJ C 080 16.03.1998, p. 0189-0242	19/02/1998	EP	Summary

The impact of biotechnology in agriculture

The committee approved the proposed legislative resolution on the impact of biotechnology on agriculture almost unanimously. Given the anticipated population explosion, with the world's population of 5.8 billion expected to double in 30 years' time and the fact that there is little margin to increase the world's arable land of 1.5 billion hectares (as 90% of the potential land is already being farmed), modern biotechnology has a key role to play as far as the expected progress and development requirements of the 21st century are concerned. In the agricultural sector, biotechnology may fulfil this role and help to feed the world's population, provided that vital natural resources are used sparingly and sustainably. The rapporteur, Mrs Hedwig Keppelhoff-Wiechert (PPE, D) used this clear, solid starting point to develop this subject and analyse the pros and cons of using biotechnology in agriculture. The draft resolution adopted voices her concern about sustainable and environmentally-friendly production and emphasises the most urgent economic aspects, including in terms of preventing the risk of monopolies in this new technological sector, and even outlines the legal framework for any form of exploitation of genetic engineering. The rapporteur points out in this respect that European legislation will need to adapt to the rate of legal developments in other countries, especially the United States and Japan, and that the Commission should examine whether there is a need for harmonisation with Japanese and US legislation and seek to establish corresponding international standards, while ensuring that the level of protection they offer does not fall below what has been already achieved. In calling for provision to be made in the fifth research programme for research into "biotechnology in agriculture and food production", Mrs Keppelhoff-Wiechert stated that, if the conditions and principles set out in her report were followed, innovative and responsible use could be made of the potential of biotechnology in Europe. ?

The impact of biotechnology in agriculture

In adopting the report by Mrs Hedwig KEPPELHOFF-WIECHERT (PPE, D) on the impact of biotechnology on agriculture, the European Parliament calls on the Member States and applicant countries to take policy decisions capable of ensuring that modern biotechnology makes significant contributions to feeding the world's population and ensuring that vital natural resources are used sparingly and sustainably. It stresses that, for the potential of biotechnology to be fully and safely exploited, the best possible system of tests and checks must be created to enable innovative and, at the same time, responsible development of biotechnology in Europe, taking into account ethical aspects, the consequences for nature and the environment, the health and well being of humans and the consequences for individual animals. It stipulates that the use of genetically modified organisms must not damage health or the environment under any circumstances and calls on the Commission to ensure that the European legal framework for biotechnology and genetic engineering offers a high level of protection against harmful side effects and to ascertain as to whether there is a need for harmonization with Japanese and US legislation and to seek to establish corresponding international standards, while ensuring that the level of protection they offer does not fall below what has been already achieved. Calling for environmentally friendly production methods, Parliament stresses that the use of varieties which genetic modification has made resistant to certain diseases and pests could help reduce the use of chemical plant protection products. It recognizes that genetic engineering can improve the capacity of plants to assimilate nutrients, which could reduce the use of fertilizers and the leaching of nutrients into the ground water. There may, however, be a potential risk of certain genetically modified organisms destroying biological balances in nature and doing harm to the biotope. Taking the view that it will only be possible to feed the world's fast growing population in future if agricultural production is sustainably increased. Parliament considers that this could be achieved using soft technologies in a responsible manner. Parliament points out the genetic engineering offers new opportunities to agriculture enabling it to improve the Community of raw materials for the production of foodstuffs with a view to improving food supplies. It calls for measures to restore consumer confidence by ensuring that genetically-engineering foodstuffs and feeding stuffs are clearly labelled and calls on the Commission to submit a proposal for harmonizing the costs incurred in connection with authorization procedures and the conduct of release tests. Finally, Parliament calls for biotechnology to be maintained as a separate specific research sector within the fifth research programme and would also like to see 'biology in agriculture and food production' included as a separate activity within that sector. It calls for the promotion of information of innovative technologies with specific references to 'green' biotechnology. ?