



Genetically Modified Organisms:

Iceland – General Overview

Recent Developments

Public opinion A 2005 survey showed 90% of the Icelandic public saying GM products should be labelled and 65% opposed to production of GM food.

Law and markets GM food and feed contaminated with GM maize and soya are imported to Iceland, mainly from the US, unlabelled since Iceland does not have any GM labelling legislation. Iceland is a member of the EEA and should therefore follow EU regulations on GMOs. Delays within the EEA bureaucracy in ratifying EU laws have provided the government with a justification for working to outdated regulations on the release of GMOs, labelling and traceability.

GMO Licences In 1998-2005 the licencing & monitoring authority, Environment and Food Agency (EFA) of Iceland, issued 14 licences for contained indoor use of GMOs. Two licences were issued for outdoor release of GM crops, the first one for 2003-2008 and the second for 2005-2009. Both of those were granted to ORF Genetics Ltd. to grow GM barley for pharmaceutical production. No special conditions, such as independent environmental or health impact assessment, were set, and monitoring procedures are not very rigorous. There is however a possibility that EFA will ask ORF to conduct a feeding trial of the GM barley, at some stage.

GM Pharmaceutical Barley Project Taken together, ORF's licences will allow the company to grow GM pharmaceutical barley on up to 30 ha in the middle of Iceland's main agricultural region. However both licences are dressed as "crop trials". Barley is mostly self-pollinating but not completely. Biologists do not exclude the possibility of barley cross-pollinating with lymegrass, Iceland's main land reclamation plant. Furthermore, recent barley crop trials in Iceland demonstrate how weather, livestock and wild birds make "containment" impossible.

Information Campaign Five voluntary consumer, health and environmental organisations pooled together in 2004 to establish an Information Campaign on GMOs. The campaign has already launched a bi-lingual website and held one conference, has invited senior international scientists to Iceland for consultation and held numerous meetings with authorities, and has prompted considerable debate in the media on the issue.

GM-Free Areas in Iceland Currently there are no declared GM-free areas in Iceland. However, one of the organisations behind the Campaign, the Nature Health Association of Iceland, has decided to set up such an area on its property in South Iceland. Formal announcement of this is expected in January 2006. Several private agencies and farmers are expected to follow suit.

Websites and links

Campaigning groups	Information Campaign on GMOs in Iceland	www.erfdabreytt.net
Government agencies	Environment & Food Agency of Iceland	www.ust.is
	Ministry of Environment	www.umhverfisraduneyti.is
Biotechnology	ORF Genetics Ltd.	www.orfgenetics.com