

Terms of Reference of the European GMO Socio-Economics Bureau (ESEB)

1- Background

The report on the socio-economic implications of the cultivation of GMOs published on 15 April 2011¹ called for "an advanced reflection at European level, with sound scientific basis, with the objective of:

- *Defining a robust set of factors to properly capture the actual ex ante and ex post socio-economic consequences of the cultivation of GMOs, from seed production to consumers across the European Union. A methodological framework should be built-up to define precise socio-economic indicators to be monitored in the long run, and the appropriate rules for data collection. The pool of consulted parties should embrace all the regulatory and economic actors of the "seed-to-shelves" chain, as well as the wider society.*
- *Exploring different approaches to possibly make use of the increased understanding of these multi-dimensional socio-economic factors in the management of GMO cultivation in the European Union. The expertise of the Member States having already started reflecting on these aspects should be taken into consideration.*

This reflection should be set up and implemented jointly by the Member States and the Commission. Stakeholders should also be actively associated to ensure the success of this process."

To follow up on this conclusion, the Commission announced to the Member States at meetings of the Competent Authorities under Directive 2001/18/EC, at the JRC-FAO workshop on socioeconomic impacts of GMO cultivation² and at the public Conference on socio-economic impacts of GMO cultivation³, that a technical working group (the "European GMO Socio-Economics Bureau" - ESEB) composed of experts from the Member States and the Commission would be set up to achieve the first objective.

2- Mission, scope and deliverables of the European GMO Socio-Economics Bureau (ESEB)

1. Mission

The mission of the ESEB is to organise and facilitate the exchange of technical and scientific information regarding the socio-economic implications of the cultivation and use of GMOs between Member States and the Commission. On the basis of this process, the ESEB will develop Reference Documents that will enable a science-based assessment of these impacts in the Member States and across the EU.

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/biotechnology/reports_studies/index_en.htm

² 23-24 November 2011 (http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/biotechnology/docs/gmo_agenda18102011_en.pdf)

³ 18 October 2011 (http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/biotechnology/docs/gmo_agenda18102011_en.pdf)

2. Scope

The scope of the ESEB will cover the impacts of GM crop cultivation in the EU, and the impacts of the use of these GM crops for food, feed or industrial purposes (along the whole food/industrial chain, and marketing to consumers). It should focus on particular crops/traits or products of direct relevance to the European Internal Market that are currently approved or awaiting approval for cultivation and use at EU level.

3. Goals and output

The ESEB will aim to achieve these goals:

- To define methodological tools to investigate the crop/trait or product-specific ex-ante and ex-post socio-economic implications, on users and non-users of GMOs, of the cultivation and processing of GMOs along the seed-to-shelves chain in Europe.
- To undertake analysis of the data collected at Member State level according to the agreed methodologies as necessary.

To this end the ESEB will:

1. Define sets of crop/trait or product-specific indicators related to the socio-economic impacts of the cultivation and processing of GMOs, to be measured at Member State or other appropriate levels,
2. Define the methodologies and tools needed to *collect* existing and/or new data in a consistent way at Member State or other appropriate levels, and the methodologies necessary to perform a robust socio-economic analysis of the collated data to enable cross-comparison between Member States.
3. As necessary, analyse the socio-economic data generated by Member States and by any other relevant information sources (published) and make the analysis available via reports to the Member States, the Commission and the public.

The outputs 1 and 2 will be consolidated in "Reference Documents" that will assist Member States should they wish to carry out socio-economic impact assessments of GMOs at national level.

For a particular GM crop/trait or product, the impacts on different sectors of the economy and the society, and the indicators to be measured can vary between Member States. The Reference Documents will be developed so that they are, as far as possible, applicable across the EU, whilst at the same time taking into consideration the diversity of European socio-economic contexts.

Socioeconomic impact assessments in this context are understood to cover, as far as possible, the whole chain, namely farmers (households), consumers, upstream and downstream sectors (seed, feed, food industry) as well as the trade sector.

The ESEB may provide technical guidance for primary data collection activities in the Member States and gathering at EU level, according to the parameters and methodology agreed in the Reference Documents. The ESEB could also provide a central repository for data collected by the Member States for further analysis as necessary.

3- Composition and hosting of the ESEB

The ESEB will consist of a Secretariat and a Technical Working Group (TWG). The ESEB Secretariat will be composed of Commission staff with a technical/scientific profile.

1. ESEB Secretariat

The ESEB Secretariat will include staff from the Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Commission and a Seconded National Expert.

The Secretariat will work in close collaboration with DG SANCO. The Secretariat will be responsible for the overall scientific, technical and administrative management of the ESEB.

The ESEB Secretariat will be located at the JRC-IPTS (Institute for Prospective Technological Studies) in Seville and attached to JRC Unit J.4 "Agriculture and Life Sciences in the Economy". The work of the ESEB will be imbedded in the JRC Action No. 21104 "New Technologies in Agriculture - their agronomic and socio-economic impact" (AGRITECH) of the IPTS. The synergy with the AGRITECH work programme will ensure that relevant research conducted in the JRC, and elsewhere in the Member States, at the level of the European Union, and of international organisations or third countries, will be readily accessible for analysis and use by the ESEB.

2. ESEB Technical Working Group (TWG)

The TWG will consist of technical/scientific experts nominated by the Member States. Member States will be invited via their Competent Authorities to nominate one technical expert for the TWG. The details of the nominee will be communicated to DG SANCO under Directive 2001/18/EC.

Member States will be requested to ensure that their nominee has the necessary technical expertise⁴ to contribute to the TWG.

It is expected that nominees from each Member State are able to access the widest network of expertise available in their Member State, and have the capacity to collate and consolidate the information gathered on behalf of their Member State and to communicate this to the TWG.

If necessary, nominees may be substituted on an ad-hoc basis at the meetings of the TWG by a specialist with expertise in a specific area.

On a case-by-case basis, the ESEB Secretariat may invite scientists and/or experts, for instance from EU-funded research projects, to participate in the TWG.

It is considered that it is in the interest of Member States to engage in, and contribute to the work of the ESEB. In this regard, the expenses for the nominated experts of the Member States attending plenary meetings of the ESEB are not covered by the Commission.

Apart from published data collected by the ESEB Secretariat, the TWG participants will be the primary source of information used for the development of draft Reference Documents.

⁴ As way of example, the Nominees are expected to be experienced in areas such as:

- Socio-economic impact assessments of policy/products or technologies in the agro-food area;
- Collating and analysing socio-economic data;
- In all cases, understanding of the whole agricultural supply chain (seed-to-table).

4. Work procedures of the ESEB

1. General elements

The work procedures of the ESEB will be broadly modelled on those established for the "European Coexistence Bureau" (ECoB)⁵.

The ESEB will draft an initial 3-year work programme in agreement with DG SANCO. The finalised work programme will be presented to the Competent Authorities of the Member States under Directive 2001/18/EC, which will have the possibility to provide within 1 month any relevant technical inputs on the different action points to be addressed by the ESEB during the 3-year working period.

DG SANCO will present the finalised work programme to the Advisory Group of the Food Chain, Animal Health and Plant Health⁶, which will have the possibility to provide within 1 month any relevant technical inputs on the different action points to be addressed by the ESEB during the 3-year working period.

The ESEB will review its work programme on an annual basis and forward any recommendations for revision to DG SANCO. The outcomes of the annual review will be shared with the Competent Authorities of the Member States under Directive 2001/18/EC.

This procedure will be repeated for following work programmes.

The ESEB Secretariat will develop and propose the structure and outline for the Reference Documents and distribute these within ESEB as a starting point.

The ESEB Secretariat will organise and chair the work of the TWG.

The ESEB Secretariat will also:

- foster the exchange of information,
- analyse the information collected,
- organise technical hearings and visits as appropriate,
- based on input from the TWG, draft the Reference Documents and reports for adoption by the TWG.

Reference Documents and reports will be adopted by consensus within the TWG. Where a consensus is not reached on specific scientific and technical points, the different interpretation(s) will be clearly documented in footnotes or annexes.

DG SANCO will be responsible for making the Reference Documents and reports available to both the Advisory Group of the Food Chain, Animal Health and Plant Health, and the Competent Authority of Directive 2001/18/EC for a 1 month comment period, prior to publication. Comments from stakeholders and Competent Authorities will be communicated to the ESEB for consideration.

The final Reference documents and reports will be put on the ESEB website in agreement with DG SANCO.

⁵ <http://ecob.jrc.ec.europa.eu/>. ECoB has been set up by the Commission to develop crop specific guidelines for coexistence measures and to explore the challenges and possible solutions for the coexistence of GM and non-GM crops.

⁶ This group consists of representatives from agriculture, environment protection and the agro-food chain.

The ESEB secretariat will initiate a review of finalized Reference Documents when deemed necessary due to advances in methodologies for data collection or analysis.

2. Technical Working Group working procedures

The ESEB Secretariat will provide the infrastructure for the meetings of the TWG, including responsibility for the agenda.

The online and email-based exchange of information will be the main way of carrying out work in the TWG. This information exchange will be facilitated through a closed, access-protected electronic internet platform accessible via the official ESEB internet site.

The start of work on a Reference Document will be announced to the Competent Authorities under Directive 2001/18/EC and published on the ESEB internet site in good time. It is envisaged that there will be an initial kick-off meeting for each Reference Document, with subsequent meetings to be determined by the ESEB Secretariat as necessary.

Following each meeting, detailed notes together with an annotated revised draft of the Reference Document will be drawn up. The TWG members will provide data and information for the elaboration, clarification and further development of the Reference Document.

If deemed necessary by the ESEB Secretariat, additional ad-hoc short-term technical sub-groups may be created to address specific issues that arise. The ESEB Secretariat will provide infrastructure for such sub-group meetings and organise and chair these meetings.
