



European Plant Science Organisation
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Short comments from EPSO members on the ECJ Ruling regarding mutagenesis and the Genetically Modified Organisms Directive

If you would like to submit a short statement to be displayed on the EPSO website in conjunction with the EPSO's first reaction, please, send a "one sentence comment" to ralf.wilhelm@julius-kuehn.de

Brussels, 30.7.2018

"With this decision, Europe misses many chances to apply knowledge obtained in plant molecular biology (and largely supported by public money) in an ecologically and economically productive way. The decision will prevent to overcome hurdles that so far have limited, and will continue to limit, classical breeding programs."

***Dr. Ortrun Mittelsten Scheid**, Gregor Mendel Institute of Molecular Plant Biology, Vienna, Austria*

It is sad that the court's decision paves the way to the situation where something is regulated, but this regulation is not scientifically sound and it is impossible to ascertain whether the regulation is followed or not (as it is impossible to distinguish the CRISP-d genotype from natural mutated genotype). This is not a good legislative practice.

***Prof. Erkki Truve**, Tallinn University of Technology, Tallinn, Estonia*

"I'm highly disappointed by the ruling of the ECJ since in its key points it is by no means science based and will inhibit important agricultural innovations on the cost of European regional breeders, farmers and of the environment as well."

***Prof. Dr. Josef Glössl**, Department of Applied Genetics and Cell Biology, University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna (BOKU Vienna), Austria*

"I find it unbelievable that new plant varieties obtained via the new CRISPR-CAS method inducing targeted mutations and applied worldwide in many labs, will be regulated more strictly than new plant varieties obtained via the existing unsafe and dangerous random mutation inducing methods such as irradiation and chemical mutagenesis."

***Prof. A. Depicker**, Department Plant Biotechnology and Bioinformatics in Ghent University Center of Plant Systems Biology in VIB, Ghent, Belgium*

“After more than 10 years of debate on modern biotechniques and plants modified by them, thousands of scientific papers and reports from academies, competent authorities etc. published, the European Union has not been able to work on a fit for purpose legislation but has delegated the responsibility to a judge to legally interpret an old legislation, drafted almost 20 years ago and not adapted to today’s challenges - a dramatic failure of the EU policy makers in the Member States and in Brussels.”

Prof. Dr. Joachim Schiemann, former head of Department at the Julius Kühn-Institute, Germany

“I hope that any EU ruling will do not stop innovations in Agri Sciences!”

Prof. Jacek Hennig, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, Poland

“The ECJ ruling is based on a complete misunderstanding of the scientific evidence, principles of biology and genetics, and the correct application of the precautionary principle; it short changes European farmers, consumers, and the environment by advocating a return to old and inaccurate approaches to plant breeding.”

Prof. Alan H. Schulman, LUKE Natural Resources Institute Finland & Institute of Biotechnology, Univ. Helsinki, Finland

“GMOs have a longer safety record than your iPhone. I am comforted by the fact that the ECJ hasn’t limited medical doctors to leeches and bloodletting.”

Thomas Jacobs Ghent University, Department of Plant Biotechnology and Bioinformatics, and VIB Center for Plant Systems Biology, Ghent, Belgium

“Not being able to apply genome editing using recent techniques prevents dealing with climate change-induced crop loss (clearly an issue if we only consider the high temperature and drought Belgium is currently suffering from), will speed up European agriculture and economy sliding into the abyss, and will surely make food prices go up.”

Ive De Smet, VIB-UGent Center for Plant Systems Biology, Ghent, Belgium

“Don’t stop us of putting right (using genome-editing) what went wrong (climate change)!”

Prof. Dr. Lieven De Veylder, VIB-UGent Center for Plant Systems Biology, Ghent, Belgium

“Europe needs more science-based decisions and politics”

Dirk Inzé, VIB-UGent Center for Plant Systems Biology, Ghent, Belgium

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Useful links

Court of Justice of the EU: Judgment in Case C-528/16, 25.7.2018 [Press Release](#); [Ruling](#)
Court of Justice of the EU: Advocate General's Opinion in Case C-528/16, 18.1.2018. [Press Release](#); [Opinion](#)
Court of Justice of the EU: [Case C-528/16](#)

EC: [Explanatory Note on New Techniques in Agricultural Biotechnology from EC's High Level Scientific Advice Mechanism](#), 28.4.2017

EC news alert: "[Commission's top scientific advisers publish explanatory note on new techniques in agricultural biotechnology](#)", 28.4.2017

EPSO [Working Group on Agricultural Technologies](#):

Statements drafted by this group and approved by the EPSO representatives are for instance:

- EPSO updated statement on [Crop Genetic Improvement Technologies](#), 12.01.2017
- EPSO: [First reaction on the Advocate General's Opinion regarding mutagenesis and the Genetically Modified Organisms Directive](#), 18.1.2018
- EPSO: [Opinion on the SAM Explanatory Note on New Techniques in Agricultural Biotechnology](#), 15.9.2017
- EPSO: [Synthetic Biology should not be confused with the application of new breeding techniques](#), updated statement, 30.8.2017
- EPSO: [Comment on the report of the Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group on Synthetic Biology](#), 8.3.2018, [Original report of the AHTEG and all submitted comments](#).

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About EPSO

EPSO, the European Plant Science Organisation, is an independent academic organisation that represents more than 200 research institutes, departments and universities from 28 European countries, Australia and New Zealand, and 3.300 individuals Personal Members, representing over 27 000 people working in plant science. EPSO's mission is to improve the impact and visibility of plant science in Europe, to provide authoritative source of independent information on plant science including science advice to policy, and to promote training of plant scientists to meet the 21st century challenges in breeding, agriculture, horticulture, forestry, plant ecology and sectors related to plant science. www.epsoweb.org