

Brussels, 22 February 2000

Dr. Caroline Lucas
MEP
The European Parliament
Rue Wiertz
B-1047 Brussels

Dear Dr. Lucas,

Thank you for your letter of 29 November 1999 concerning a petition demanding mandatory labelling of all products containing material derived from genetically modified organisms. Furthermore, you ask me for an up-date on the Commission's position on labelling of GMO's.

Let me reiterate my commitment to provide consumers with all the information they need to enable them to make an informed choice.

I am sure that you are well aware that the Commission has put in place a general framework for labelling of Novel Foods which ensures that the final consumer is informed of the following:

- The presence of a genetically modified organism
- Any characteristic (including the method by which it was obtained) which renders the food or food ingredient no longer equivalent to an existing food or food ingredient because of its composition, nutritional value or effects or intended use. This non-equivalence must be based on a scientific assessment taking into account a comparison of the GMO-derived product with other similar conventional products.
- The presence of material not normally present in equivalent foodstuffs and which may have implications for the health of certain parts of the population (e.g. allergies)
- The presence of material not normally present in existing equivalent foodstuffs and which gives rise to ethical concerns.

In addition to these provisions, the Commission is now developing further detailed implementation rules on labelling, such as the labelling of additives and flavourings and the introduction of a 1 % de minimis threshold for adventitious contamination, above which products have to be labelled.

The Commission is also currently considering the development of a legislative framework for a "GMO-free" production line in order to enable the consumers to have a clear choice between products.

Furthermore, in the White Paper on Food Safety published 12 January, the Commission announced its intention to harmonise all the provisions governing the labelling of food, additives and flavourings containing or derived from GMO material and to present a proposal for legislation on genetically modified feed.

Yours sincerely,

David Byrne