

GM debate bubbles below the surface

The Austrian EU presidency recently hosted a conference on GM and non-GM crops coexistence (http://europa.eu.int/comm/agriculture/events/vienna2006/index_en.htm) in Vienna.

The conference started with two premises - that GM crops had a right to be grown in the EU as long as they were deemed to be safe (i.e. having passed through the EU approvals process which is a debateable hurdle) and that adventitious presence of below 0.9% would not need to be classified as GM.

It is clear that there is no consensus between the GE industry and the NGOs, between the European Parliament and the Commission. There is also no consensus between Commissioners on co-existence and what should be included in any regulations. There has been a dispute between the elected European Parliament, which believes that co-existence regulations should be set at a community level, while the appointed Commission has declared that it is an issue for the individual member states. Co-existence is a national issue, they say, but within set boundaries.

The Commission has issued guidelines (the Christmas tree as they like to call it) to help Member States with their different types of agriculture, topography and climate to develop national strategies and best practices (decorate the tree). Currently only Denmark has legislation in place. Hungary has brought forward tough draft recommendations that the Commission rejected.

It is clear that not only has the Commission presented the EU family with their Christmas tree to decorate but also provided them with a rather limited box of decorations from which to choose.

*Dr Bruce Pearce
April 2006*