

GMOs and genome editing **Health Canada's voluntary approach deemed insufficient**

LONGUEUIL, June 22, 2022 /CNW/ Telbec – Four major organizations from the Quebec agriculture and agri-food sector have issued a joint statement concerning the tabling, last May, of Health Canada's guidelines for the management of products derived from genomic editing. Genome editing consists of modifying the DNA of a cell by selectively removing or adding genes.



The Union des producteurs agricoles (UPA), the Conseil de la transformation alimentaire du Québec (CTAQ), the Filière biologique du Québec (FBQ) and the Conseil des appellations réservées et des termes valorisants (CARTV) concerning the tabling, last May, of Health Canada's guidelines for the management of products derived from genomic editing. Genome editing consists of modifying the DNA of a cell by selectively removing or adding genes.



According to Martin Caron, President of UPA, "Although genome-editing techniques may allow certain sectors to innovate, it is essential that mechanisms be put in place to preserve producers' freedom of choice, particularly by ensuring that they have access to clear information on the type of seed they are buying. By proposing a voluntary process to ensure transparency about genome-edited varieties, the Government of Canada is depriving agricultural producers of essential information if we are to continue to meet the demands of consumers who do not wish to consume these products."



For her part, Sylvie Cloutier, President and CEO of the CTAQ, emphasizes that, "It is important for manufacturers to be able to continue to ensure the traceability of ingredients used in the manufacturing of food products and, thus, meet the demand of consumers who want GMO-free food. To do so, the ingredients used by processors must include a clear indication that they come from genomic editing when this is the case. "

Daniel Dubuc, President of FBQ, believes that the voluntary approach proposed by Health Canada calls into question the very application of the Canadian organic product regulations. In this regard, he specifies that "Canadian organic standards prohibit the use of seeds and products derived from genetic engineering, including those derived from genomic editing, and that companies holding organic certification are required to prove their non-use."



On her side, Marie-Josée Guin, President and CEO of the CARTV, emphasizes that "in the application of the regulations, it is essential to systematically and unequivocally identify the inputs used in the production and processing of organic food. Thus, the mechanisms in place should allow control bodies and authorities to carry out their activities in order to guarantee the integrity of organic products."

In light of these statements, we can see that this decision by Health Canada, presented as a simple administrative change, actually creates significant constraints for the development of the Canadian agriculture and agri-food sector.

The main representatives of the Quebec agriculture and agri-food sector therefore invite Health Canada, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada to reconsider the voluntary aspect of the transparency initiative.

In addition, they are asking them to form a joint working committee to quickly agree on the means necessary to preserve the right of producers to know what they are seeding, the right of processors to use the ingredients of their choice according to the markets they are targeting, and the right of the organic sector to meet both the current Canadian organic standards and the promises made to consumers.

About the partners involved

The UPA is a professional union organization whose main mission is to promote, defend and develop the interests of some 42,000 Quebec agricultural producers.

The CTAQ is a consolidation of the strengths of the agri-food industry that represents 13 associations and more than 600 member companies. The organization's mission is to represent, promote and defend the interests of its members.

La Filière biologique is a development organization that represents more than 3,300 Quebec companies marketing more than 11,600 certified organic products.

CARTV is the public authority that ensures the authenticity of distinctive agriculture and agri-food products by overseeing the certification of reserved designations and value-added terms, including the organic production method in Quebec.

- 30 -

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