As regards conventional agriculture, it is recalled that, at its meetings in November and December 1998, the Agriculture Council addressed the general issue of the assessment of genetically modified crops in the context of the adoption of a Council Directive on seeds (1). At the time of the adoption of that Directive, the Commission undertook to examine the concept of an assessment of the advantages and disadvantages resulting from the use of seed of genetically modified plant varieties in respect of established agricultural practices, and the possible impact thereof on Community law on agricultural matters.

The Council would draw attention to the existence of Directive 90/220/EEC on the deliberate release into the environment of genetically modified organisms. A proposal for an amendment to that Directive has been forwarded by the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament. The proposal, which has been modified in response to the amendments put forward by the European Parliament in plenary session, provides for a strengthening of the administrative controls laid down by the Directive. The Council would point out that the approval application calls for an evaluation of environmental risks. Such evaluation is based on field tests and on parallel research into the possible release of genetically modified plants or parts thereof into surrounding crop areas. A condition of the approval decision may also make it compulsory to monitor the cultivation and possible release into the environment of GMOs over a number of years and, if need be, to reconsider the situation.

The Council agrees with the Honourable Member that it is of the utmost importance that consumers should have the option of consuming food that is free of all genetically modified ingredients, including genetically modified derivatives.

It might be useful in this respect to make reference to the Environment Council meeting on 24/25 June 1999, at which a common position was reached on the amended proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 90/220/EEC on the deliberate release into the environment of genetically modified organisms, and at which the following issues were highlighted:

- the requirement for the clear and unambiguous labelling of such products at all stages of the marketing process;
- the need for provisions other than on labelling in order to ensure that GMOs which are placed on the market can be easily traced by the competent authorities.

Finally, the measures to be taken with regard to labelling are regarded as supplementing those laid down by Regulation (EC) No 258/97 (‘Novel foods’) and Council Regulation (EC) No 1139/98 on the labelling of certain types of maize and soya.


(2000/C 280 E/007)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-2074/99
by Agnes Schierhuber (PPE-DE) to the Commission

(12 November 1999)

Subject: Market transparency in agriculture

In some respects the internal market does not function at all or functions poorly where the operating resources and inputs needed in agriculture are concerned. This is due partly to the lack of market transparency and partly to the absence or total inadequacy of European Community rules.

Commission research (Eudramat) shows that, as national certification procedures continue to exist, identical drugs are sold at very different prices in the various Member States. A study based on this research indicates a potential saving for health insurance funds, consumers and farmers in Austria of about
EUR 1 billion a year. If this is extrapolated to the whole EU market, the present decentralised certification system is costing Europeans up to EUR 35 billion a year. The situation is similar in the case of plant protection products.

1. What measures to increase the transparency of the markets in seed, feedingstuffs and fertilisers are planned?

2. What measures to bring about a functioning internal market in tractors and other agricultural machinery, veterinary medicinal products and plant protection products are planned?

I would appreciate more than just a reference to the present rules.

**Answer given by Mr Liikanen on behalf of the Commission**

(25 January 2000)

Member States and the Commission share on a regular basis information on the net selling price of seeds received by growers, on total quantities harvested, total trade for the marketing year, on stocks as well as on the internal consumption forecasted. This information is assembled at Community level by the Commission and submitted for discussion at the meetings of the management committee for seeds and of the standing group on seeds of the advisory committee on agricultural product health and safety. Any differences in prices of the same species are normally justified by the specific characteristics of the product like varieties or origin, productivity, disease resistance and so on. Therefore the Commission remains convinced that the existing rules ensure a good level of transparency of the market in seeds. On this issue, there are no medium-term proposals planned.

In the field of animal feedingstuff, the Community acts on the basis of harmonised Community legislation, which sets the rules for the placing on the market, for labelling of additives, for raw materials and for compound feedingstuff.

The main objective is to guarantee the safety of use of feedingstuffs, and to inform stockbreeders on the nature and the characteristics of food that they use to feed their animals. Following the dioxin crisis, the Commission submitted to the Council and to the Parliament a working programme in order to improve the tracing back of animal feed and in particular to enhance the safety of animal feedingstuffs by improving control procedures. Moreover, the Commission, in conjunction with the consultative and management committees concerned, carries out a permanent monitoring of the market of animal feedingstuffs.

Harmonised legislation for placing fertilisers on the market exists since 1976, when Council Directive 76/116/EEC of 18 December 1975 on the approximation of the laws of the Member States relating to fertilisers(1) came into effect. Meanwhile, the Directive was amended or adapted to technical progress 17 times and a report by the SLIM (Simplification of legislation for the single market) group in October 1997, which evaluated the performance of the legislation with regard to its transparency and effectiveness, concluded that the legislation operated rather well.

Indeed, more than 90% of the cross-border trade of fertilisers in the Community is estimated to be by Community fertiliser that falls under Directive 76/116/EEC, and more than 50% of all fertilisers marketed in the Community carry the label "EC-Fertilisers".

Community fertiliser legislation is complemented by national legislation concerning authorisation for placing on the national market, national or imported fertilisers that are non-Community fertilisers. They concern types of fertilisers for which to date no harmonised regulation exist (for instance organic or organo-mineral fertilisers). However, following a recommendation of the SLIM group, it is planned to include these fertilisers into the harmonised regulation as soon as the current 18 directives have been recast into a single new directive, which constitutes a further improvement of market transparency. Work is in full progress and submission of the recast directives to Council and Parliament is planned for the year 2000.

The process of simplification as well as of adaptation to technical progress is conducted with full consultation of all concerned, including industry, and thus ensures further that the high degree of transparency already in place is being maintained.
Since 1988, Community type approval for wheeled agricultural or a forestry tractor has been optional — see Council Directive 74/150/EEC of 4 March 1974. The Commission is working on a complete overhaul of the type approval legislation for tractors to make Community type approval compulsory. This would ensure the single market in this sector. The draft directive will be submitted in 2000 to Council and to Parliament.

The Commission has recently granted a contract to independent management consultants to evaluate the functioning of procedures to authorise medicinal products in the Community. This includes the procedures to evaluate veterinary medicinal products. The consultants are expected to talk to representatives of all Concerned. The report is expected to be ready by the end of 2000. Depending on the outcome of the report the Commission will reconsider existing Community legislation and the authorisation procedures therein.

Council Directive 91/414/EEC of 15 July 1991 concerning the placing of plant protection products on the market, provides a harmonised framework for the safety review of active substances and for national authorisations of plant protection products. It has been implemented in national law in all Member States. Working group discussions with Member States are under way to provide guidance on remaining open questions, which concern, for example, parallel imports. Overall, in the sector of plant protection products, a high degree of harmonisation and transparency has been achieved.


WRITTEN QUESTION E-2096/99
by Christos Folias (PPE-DE) to the Commission
(19 November 1999)

Subject: The Y2K problem

The YTK problem is caused by the inability of many computer systems correctly to process dates after 31.12.1999, owing to the widespread practice of having only two digits to indicate the year.

Since the problem may have consequences for the internal functioning of the Community institutions and also for the implementation of certain Community policies, such as for example, the internal market, e-commerce, banking transactions, etc., will the Commission say:

1. What measures does it intend to take to address the Y2K problem and publish information about it?

2. How does it intend to notify the authorities of the Member States and public opinion about matters which fall within the Community's purview and to take coordinating measures, where appropriate?

Answer given by Mr Liikanen on behalf of the Commission
(10 January 2000)

The Commission has published on the Europa server at http://europa.eu.int/comm/y2k/preparation a summary of the measures it has taken to ensure its own internal preparedness and continued functioning.

As for the other institutions, the inter-institutional committee for informatics (CII) continues to co-ordinate year 2000 (Y2K) activities to ensure a common approach to the problem. The Commission also organised in July 1999 a symposium with Member States and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) on the adaptation of European information systems to the year 2000 and the Euro.