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## Germany

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### Poultry Industry Gives Up GMO-Free Promise

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**Report Highlights:**

The German poultry farmers association (ZDG) recently withdrew its 14 year old commitment to only use non-GMO soybeans in poultry feed. ZDG stated that imports of non-GMO soybeans are no longer reliable since Brazil will reportedly cut supplies by 50 percent in 2014. ZDG also said that the danger of cross-contamination between GMO and conventional crops puts producer and handlers at legal risk in the EU. Germany is one of the EU's largest poultry producers, using over 800,000 tons of soybean meal annually as a protein feed ingredient.

On February 18, 2014, the German poultry farmers association (known under the German acronym ZDG) issued a [press release](#) backing away from its 14 year old commitment to use only non-GMO soybeans in poultry production. ZDG asserts that non-GMO soybean supplies cannot be guaranteed since Brazil, the main supplier, is likely to cut production by 50 percent in 2014. ZDG also said that the danger of cross-contamination between GMO and conventional crops has risen.

"The German poultry industry has made great efforts to offer poultry meat from animals raised on GMO-free feeds" but that "chicken and turkey production cannot be undertaken in Germany without use of genetic technology" the association said. "Specialized factories for the production of poultry feed require a continuous supply of uncontaminated GMO-free soybeans, but supplies can no longer be guaranteed in the required volumes."

Germany is one of the EU's largest poultry meat producers. In 2013, Germany produced about 1.4 million tons of poultry meat (out of total EU production of about 12.5 million tons). Germany is also one of the EU's largest users of soybeans and soybean meal, importing for all uses (feed, biofuels, etc.) about 6.8 million tons of soybeans and products in 2013.

Chicken and turkey farmers in Germany annually use about 4.1 million tons of animal feed, of which soy meal is a key protein component. It is estimated that German poultry farmers use over 800,000 tons of soybean meal annually, a figure that is not likely to change much even if the industry and uses GMO soybeans more broadly.

German poultry production has been a celebrated success story in recent years, buoyed by both rising production and rising consumption. The ZDG announcement is a clear signal that producers do not want to be limited to a single product type or supplier of animal protein feed.

Below is an unofficial translation of ZDG's press release:

***The German poultry industry is looking for new alternatives in the production of animal feed: The supply of GMO-free soy can no longer be guaranteed.***

Berlin, February 18, 2014. For nearly 14 years, German chicken and turkey farmers - uniquely in meat production – have produced without genetically modified soy as part of their feeding regimen. According to Rainer Wendt, chairperson of the Association of German Chicken Producers [a member of ZDG], the German poultry industry has made a big effort to offer poultry meat from livestock fed with GMO-free feed."

Today, German poultry farmers have to give up their promise of using GMO-free animal for a variety of reasons. The supply of GMO-free soy will be less in 2014. Brazil, one of the world's largest producers of soy, will make available only 50% of the last year's supply. This is accounted for by a more extensive use of cropland for GMO-soy due to higher yield potential compared to GMO-free varieties.

The cultivation of GMO-soy, which has been growing fast in recent years, leads to more frequent “cross-contamination” in Brazilian soybean fields. In fact, the threat of contamination has risen during production, storage and transportation. Thomas Storck, chairman of the Union of German Turkey Breeders [also a member of ZDG], states that despite significant investment and intense efforts by the poultry industry to prevent contamination of any kind, contamination rates have been increasing year after year.

The short supply of GMO-free soy also poses a major challenge in other countries: British retailers drew back their “GMO-free-guarantee” on their store brands in April of last year because not enough unmodified feed would be on hand. The Danish group Dansk Slagtefjerkræ decided to withdrawal from its pledge in December 2013. Rainer Wendt and Thomas Storck are saying, that these developments are not lost on Germany. Feeding chicken and turkeys without genetic engineering is unfortunately not possible under current market conditions in Germany. Specialized factories for the production of poultry feed require a continuous supply of uncontaminated GMO-free soybeans, but supplies can no longer be guaranteed in the required volumes.

In addition, in Germany, legal certainty cannot be ensured through the interpretation of the EC Regulation Nr. 1829/2003. Under this regulation, animal feed can only be claimed to be “without the use of GM technology”, if the percentage of genetically modified organisms is below 0.9 percent and if these impurities are present due to accidental and technically unavoidable conditions. “What we observe through our ongoing monitoring today is a systematic contamination of unmodified soybeans with GMO-soy, even if the level of impurity is below the tolerance value of 0.9 percent, such that we make ourselves vulnerable with respect to the animal feed law,” according to Wendt. Additionally, it has become apparent that more and more contamination is occurring above the tolerance value of 0.9 percent.

However the current circumstances do not affect the intentions of German poultry industry to continue to fulfill its leading role. “German chicken and turkey farmers were the only ones within the entire meat sector to have committed to using unmodified animal feed. In the future, they will continue to seek opportunities to use GMO-free animal feed – although fundamentally different conditions and sustainable strategies for the production of animal feed will be necessary” Thomas Storck explains. From the point of view of the sector a variety of approaches will be explored, including changing formulations to reduce of the amount of soy in feed, an expansion in the cultivation of unmodified soybeans within Europe, the use of alternative sources of protein, as well as the utilization of new technologies in the production of animal feed to increase efficient protein usage of that protein.

Irrespective of the debate over genetically unmodified feed, the soy-moratorium, which was launched in 2006 to protect the Amazon region, is of particular importance to the poultry sector. “Further deforestation in the rainforest has to be avoided by all means. Wendt and Storck emphasize that for this purpose, the German poultry sector will continue to take a stand for the protection and preservation of rainforests by feeding certified soy meeting the specific requirements of sustainable agricultural production.” These certification programs apply to cultivation of soy outside the Amazon-biospher and encompass, among other things, social responsibility, best practices and especially responsibility towards our environment.

About the ZDG

As a professional organization, the German association of poultry farming represents the interests of the German poultry industry politically and on regulations at the federal and EU level, in professional organizations, and with the public and with foreign countries. The roughly 8000 members are organized in federal and state associations.