

USDA Foreign Agricultural Service

GAIN Report

Global Agricultural Information Network

THIS REPORT CONTAINS ASSESSMENTS OF COMMODITY AND TRADE ISSUES MADE BY
USDA STAFF AND NOT NECESSARILY STATEMENTS OF OFFICIAL U.S. GOVERNMENT
POLICY

Voluntary Public

Date: 12/15/2016

GAIN Report Number: E16063

EU-28

Post: Brussels USEU

European Commission Work Program 2017

Report Categories:

Trade Policy Monitoring

Approved By:

Mary Ellen Smith

Prepared By:

Hilde Brans

Report Highlights:

The European Commission's Work Program for 2017 does not contain any specific legislative initiatives in the field of agriculture. Of main concern however is the Commission's initiative to "modernize" the comitology (decision-making) procedures which could have an adverse impact on the future approval of genetically modified events.

European Commission Work Program for 2017

On October 25, 2016, the European Commission presented its Work Program for 2017. In line with Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker's political guidelines, i.e. "focusing only on the big things", the legislative agenda for 2017 is again very short. The real focus of the Work Program is on getting Commission proposals already on the table adopted and continuing the fitness checks and evaluations of existing legislation under the "Regulatory Fitness and Performance Program" (REFIT). The 2017 Work Program consists of a [political Communication "Delivering a Europe that protects, empowers and defends"](#) and 5 annexes: [Annex 1](#) lists 21 new initiatives; [Annex 2](#) contains 18 "REFIT" initiatives; [Annex 3](#) includes a list of 35 pending priority proposals; [Annex 4](#) sets out the "kill list", i.e. 19 proposals for withdrawal and [Annex 5](#) sets out a list of 16 legal acts that may be repealed.

Modernization of Comitology Procedures

The 2017 Work Program does not contain any specific legislative initiatives in the field of agriculture. Of main concern however, is the Commission's initiative to "modernize" the comitology procedures. When Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker delivered his State of the Union in September 2016, he stated that it is not right that when the Member States disagree among themselves, the Commission is forced to take a decision. With this statement, Mr. Juncker was referring to the failure of standing committees composed of Member State representatives to find a qualified majority in favor or against proposals for the authorization of GMOs and more recently for the use of the herbicide glyphosate. In such cases it is left to the Commission to take the final decision on adopting the text or not.

The "modernization of comitology procedures" envisioned by the Commission includes two initiatives: 1) table a proposal to align existing acts with the provisions of the Lisbon Treaty and 2) assess the democratic legitimacy of existing procedures for the adoption of delegated and implementing acts. The first initiative concerns the alignment of legislation adopted before December 1, 2009 and phase out of the "regulatory procedure with scrutiny." If this procedure is abolished as proposed, some measures no longer go to member state experts at a standing committee but instead go straight to the Council and Parliament for a decision. Examples of measures to be adopted under the regulatory procedure with scrutiny include criteria to identify endocrine disruptors for plant protection products, approving health claims and amendments to the EU positive list of food additives.

The second initiative would assess how the existing comitology procedures can be changed in order to avoid the Commission taking the final decision when Member States fail to reach an agreement. Such a change could have an adverse impact on the future approval of genetically engineered events which typically are approved after the Member States fail to take a decision. To date, it is unclear which approach the Commission will take to shift more responsibility to the Member States. Concrete proposals for both initiatives are expected in the first quarter of 2017.

Circular Economy Action Plan

Another key initiative in the Commission's Work Program that may affect food products is the adoption of measures to implement the Circular Economy Action Plan. In order to reduce food waste, the Commission will explore options for a more effective use of date marking on food and adopt a strategy on the use, reuse and recycling of plastics.

Related Reports:

- [How the European Union works – Updated guide on EU decision-making](#)
- [New online feedback tool to comment on EU draft legislation](#)
- [The classification of glyphosate by ECHA](#)