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GM-Free Labeling Conference in the European Parliament

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Report Highlights:

On March 6, 2013, the political group Greens/European Free Alliance organized a GM-free labeling conference in the European Parliament. Part of the conference was dedicated to the study commissioned by DG SANCO to assess existing GM-free labeling schemes in the EU Member States and the need for harmonization. This report provides a brief read-out of that part of the conference.

General Information:

GM-Free Labeling Conference in the European Parliament

On March 6, 2013, the political group Greens / European Free Alliance (EFA) in the European Parliament organized a conference on GM-free labeling. The current EU rules on GMOs include specific labeling requirements but do not cover food products derived from animals that have been fed with GMOs. Under EU food law, the label must indicate whether a product contains or consists of GMOs or whether it has been produced from or contains ingredients produced from GMOs. EU rules do not provide for “GM-free” or “non-GM” labeling. The Greens/EFA group is leading a campaign for a “GMO-Free Europe” and calls on the European Commission to come forward with a proposal that would extend mandatory labeling rules to food derived from animals fed with GMOs and to harmonize the requirements for a GM-free label at the EU level.

DG SANCO has commissioned a study of existing GM-free labeling schemes in the EU Member States and an assessment of the need for harmonization. The study is being conducted by the London-based consultancy service ICF GHK. At the conference, ICG GHK gave a presentation that focused on the baseline data gathering component of the study. The study, which is still in the drafting phase, maps out the GM-free labeling schemes in the EU Member States - both national and private operator schemes - to determine whether and to what extent those schemes are compatible. Based on this information, the possibility or need for harmonization of GM-free labeling rules at the EU-level will be assessed. ICF GHK has not yet finalized this part of the study but hopes to finalize the work in April and publish the results by late spring.

Ladislav Miko, Deputy Director General of DG SANCO, did not want to comment on the presentation because the study is still in the drafting phase and has not yet been approved by DG SANCO. He told the audience that the existing EU GMO legislation is the most stringent in the world but that the Commission is aware of the growing demand for GM-free labeling. Mr. Miko said that the Commission is willing to address this issue properly in order to create a level playing field for all operators. He pointed out that the EU’s GMO legislation does not prohibit GM-free labeling but that labeling should not be misleading. He noted the different approaches in the EU Member States but reiterated that the Commission will not take any initiative before the study is finalized. He added that if the Commission decides to propose GM-free labeling rules they should be workable and acceptable to all operators.

The study is part of an “ad hoc” assessment by the European Commission to understand the current state of play of GM-free labeling schemes. In a wider policy context, this study is a preliminary assessment of the situation. If the Commission decides to act on this issue, the initiative will most likely be included in the Commission’s Annual Work Program. A legislative initiative would also require a formal impact assessment.

The video of the webstreamed GM-free Labeling Conference can be downloaded from the Greens/EFA party website at <http://www.greens-efa.eu/gmo-free-labelling-of-food-products-8459.html>.