



Modified food, modified rights? Why GMO labelling must stay

Tuesday 14 October 2025 By **Suzy Sumner**



This is an opinion article by an external contributor. The views belong to the writer.



For decades, EU citizens have relied on labelling to make informed choices about their food. But that right is now at risk. A new European Commission proposal would allow genetically modified organisms (GMOs) created through new genomic techniques (NGTs) to bypass safety checks and labelling. For millions of Europeans, this is a step backwards.

In the 1990s, chemical companies like Monsanto and Bayer began developing GMOs, defined by EU law (**Directive 2001/18**) as organisms “in which the genetic material has been altered in a way that does not occur naturally by mating and/or natural recombination.”

Recognising the potential risks, the EU adopted regulations that require risk assessments for both health and the environment, along with mandatory labelling

for consumers.

Today, there are almost no GMOs in the human food supply in the EU, and many countries prohibit their cultivation. Since consumers have consistently refused to buy them, supermarkets have chosen not to stock them, and farmers have not grown any. This is a clear victory for consumers.

Now that progress is at risk of being undone. The new proposal would strip away these essential safeguards and erode consumers' right to know. European consumer organisations are pushing back, calling for full transparency and insisting that all GMOs, including those produced with NGTs, must continue to be labelled.

A GMO by any other name is still a GMO

More recently, new genetic modification techniques have been developed and called “new genomic techniques”. While these techniques enable scientists to perform genetic modifications at a targeted sequence in the DNA, they are prone to errors both at the edit site and elsewhere in the genome. Furthermore, there is no scientific evidence to support their safe use in food production since they are new and have no history of use.

In its ruling of 25 July 2018, the European Court of Justice stated that NGTs produce GMOs and must be regulated as such. In July 2023, the European Commission published a proposal on GMOs produced by NGTs (NGT-GMOs). However, this proposal disregards this ruling as it would exempt most NGT-GMOs from risk assessment, traceability and consumer labelling.

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), along with national agencies such as **France's** ANSES, the **German** Federal Agency for Nature Conservation, and the **Austrian** Environmental Agency, have never supported exempting these plants from risk assessment.

Industry lobbies raised concerns, but **internal documents** revealed that the European Commission sought to reassure them, emphasising that decisions would ultimately rest with the Commission itself, not with EFSA scientists.

Labelling is both feasible and essential

Some industrial stakeholders claim NGT-GMOs cannot be differentiated from “conventional” plants, which would make labelling difficult. However, agrochemical companies patent these plants and are able to distinguish them from their competitors’ products. Therefore it is possible to differentiate them.

Labelling would prioritise the legitimate need of consumers for transparent information over the demand of a few biotech breeders.

Fortunately, in 2024, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) voted in favour of labelling. As consumer organisations, we support this and are urging MEPs to ensure that labelling and traceability are upheld during the trilogue discussions. To backtrack would be a betrayal of citizens.

Respect fundamental consumer rights

Food traceability throughout the supply chain is a fundamental legal obligation under Article 18 of **EU General Food Law**. This applies to all food and feed, whether it is GMO or not. Exempting GMO-NGTs from traceability would violate this law.

In terms of labelling, consumers have a “right to know” enshrined in the Treaty of the EU and reinforced in Article 8 of the General Food Law. This protects consumers and enables them to make informed choices about the food they purchase.

The “high level of protection” for consumers is stipulated in Articles 114 and 169 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and Article 38 of the European Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Twenty years ago, we were told that GMOs would solve world hunger. We are still waiting. We were also promised that the use of pesticide would be reduced. The opposite has happened: most genetically modified organisms have been made tolerant to the herbicides produced by the industry.

Roundup use in the United States is now **10 times higher** today than it was 30 years ago. Those who lied to us are making the same promises again. Should we believe them?

It is time for European institutions to defend the general interest and the right of consumers to know what they eat and their freedom of choice.

This OpEd was signed by several European organisations of consumers, asking for traceability and labelling to be maintained for all GMOs, including new GMOs:

AK (Austrian Federal Chamber of Labour), Lukas Oberndorfer, Head of Department Climate, Environment and Transport.

ASUFIN (Asociación de usuarios financieros), Patricia Suárez, President.

CECU (Federación de Consumidores y Usuarios), David Sánchez Carpio, Director.

Eurocoop, Fabrizio Fabbri, Sustainability and Food Policy Manager.

Foodwatch, Suzy Sumner, Head of Brussels Office.

POLLINIS, Charlotte Labauge, GMOs & campaigner.

UFC-Que Choisir, Marie-Amandine Stévenin, Présidente.

ZPS (Slovene Consumers Association), Jasmina Bevc Bahar, Secretary-general.