

Written question on detection research

Priority question for written answer P-004657/2021
to the Commission
Rule 138
Martin Häusling (Verts/ALE)

▶ Subject: Research into reliable detection and traceability methods of new genomic techniques (NGT)

https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/P-9-2021-004657_EN.html

The MEPs' question

According to the Commission's study on new genomic techniques (NGT), a number of NGT plant products are already being commercialised or are close to being commercialised globally. So far, no NGT product has a GMO authorisation in the EU.

The Commission has recognised that the EU lacks analytical methods to detect the presence of unauthorised NGT plants in food or feed entering the EU market. It also recognises that current knowledge on the detection, identification and quantification of NGT products is mostly based on theoretical considerations and lacks experimental evidence. Many Member States and stakeholders have identified a pressing need for more research into reliable detection and traceability methods.

1. What was the level of EU funding under the seventh framework programme (2007 2014) and Horizon 2020 (2014 2020) that was spent on research into the detection, identification and quantification of NGT products?
2. What are the results of the research projects dealing with these issues?
3. Are there any planned or ongoing EU funded research projects in this area?

Supporters: This question is supported by Members other than the author: Sirpa Pietikäinen (PPE), Tilly Metz (Verts/ALE), Anja Hazekamp (The Left), Manuel Bompard (The Left), Pascal Durand (Renew), Eleonora Evi (Verts/ALE), Andreas Schieder (S&D), Günther Sidl (S&D)

Answer by Ms Gabriel

on behalf of the European Commission

1. In 2020, the Commission services carried out a portfolio analysis of EU funding for New Genomic Techniques (NGT)-related projects. These results provided a basis for the European Commission study on NGTs released on 29 April 2021¹¹.

EU research and innovation (R&I) funding for NGT-related projects under the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7, 2007-2014) and Horizon 2020 (2014-2020) amounted to EUR 3.2 billion, distributed among 1,021 projects. The analysis indicates that a number of these projects were dedicated to detection methods, regulatory-related issues, communication or ethics-related work-packages²². It

¹¹

https://ec.europa.eu/food/plants/genetically-modified-organisms/new-techniques-biotechnology/ec-study-new-genomic-techniques_en

²² These projects included *ICON*, *MULTIBIOPRO*, *Pharma-Factory* and *ERA CoBioTech*.

could be, however, that detection, identification and quantification of NGT products have been addressed in some additional projects as a dedicated task or work package, but this level of detail is difficult to extract with the existing knowledge extraction tools. Further information in relation to the FP7 and Horizon 2020 projects examined in the study and via which the metrics were derived, may be extracted via the Horizon Dashboard³³. Furthermore, project outcomes can be obtained via the CORDIS portal⁴⁴.

2. Scientific achievements were made in areas including improved detection methods and tools that can isolate, identify and characterize plant genes.

3. ERA CoBioTech is an ongoing EU Horizon 2020 research project that aims to identify and use the metabolic potential of genomic data. Under Horizon Europe, the call '*New genomic techniques (NGT): understanding benefits and risks – focus on bio-based innovation*'⁵ will focus on screening procedures, molecular tools and digital applications.

What does the Commission's answer mean?

Under the first question, the Commission does not specify the level of funding for research into the detection, identification and quantification of NGT. It names four projects: *ICON*, *MULTIBIOPRO*, *Pharma-Factory* and *ERA CoBioTech* that were supposedly "dedicated to detection methods, regulatory-related issues, communication or ethics-related work-packages".

However, none of these projects has had a focus on the detection of GMOs derived from "new genomic techniques". Where the lists of scientific outputs are available, they indicate that detection strategies and methods were not part of the scope, and certainly not strategies or methods that EU member states could use for GMO surveillance.

ICON - This project aimed at enhancing the quality of seed oils in industrial oil crops; demonstrated the potential of plant gene technology for developing renewable resources.⁶

MULTIBIOPRO - This project determined that the poplar tree and tobacco plant can serve as an effective feedstock for bio-refining, offering a performance similar to maize.⁷

Pharma-Factory - This project was aimed at developing medical, veterinary and diagnostic products using plant biotechnology.⁸

ERA CoBioTech - This project focussed on application-oriented research in:

- a) Synthetic biology approaches to design and construct new biological parts, devices and systems
- b) Systems biology approaches to metabolic engineering and optimisation of biological processes

³³ <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/opportunities/horizon-dashboard>

⁴⁴ <https://cordis.europa.eu/projects/en> and <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/722361>

⁵

<https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/opportunities/topic-details/horizon-cl6-2021-zero-pollution-01-08;callCode=null;freeTextSearchKeyword=new%20genomic%20techniques;matchWholeText=true;typeCodes=0,1,2;statusCodes=31094501,31094502,31094503;programmePeriod=null;programCcm2Id=null;programDivisionCode=null;focusAreaCode=null;destination=null;mission=null;geographicalZonesCode=null;programmeDivisionProspect=null;startDateLte=null;startDateGte=null;crossCuttingPriorityCode=null;cpvCode=null;performanceOfDelivery=null;sortQuery=sortStatus;orderBy=asc;onlyTenders=false;topicListKey=topicSearchTablePageState>

⁶ <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/211400>

⁷ <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/311804>

⁸ <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/774078>

- c) Identification and use of the metabolic potentials of genomic data
- d) Chemical and biotechnological approaches to transform bio-based molecules into molecules with high added value.⁹

The Commission's claim that the EU research resulted in "improved detection methods" in the sense of the question appears to be untrue.

In response to the third question on Horizon Europe, the Commission points to a call for proposals (*'New genomic techniques (NGT): understanding benefits and risks – focus on bio-based innovation'*) that does not include any research into the detection, identification and quantification of NGT. The call's reference to "screening procedures, molecular tools and digital applications" is unrelated to the enforcement of EU GMO law.

Conclusion

Since 2007, the EU has not financed any specific research into the detection, identification and quantification of NGT. The latest calls for proposals show that there are no plans to remedy this.

⁹ <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/722361/reporting>