UNILEVER’S POSITION ON GENETICALLY MODIFIED CROPS

Background

Since its introduction more than 20 years ago, genetic modification has become widely used to make food crops more resistant to pests, more tolerant to herbicides, and more resilient against diseases and the impact of adverse environmental conditions such as drought.

Farmers in many countries around the world, including the US, Brazil, Argentina, Canada, India, China and South Africa, now cultivate genetically modified (GM) crops that have been approved by local authorities. Large amounts of many of the world’s major agricultural food commodities, such as soy, maize, rapeseed, sugar beet and rice, are grown as GM crops. One reason for their rapid adoption by farmers is that they are easier to manage and therefore more cost-effective to grow.

Reputable regulatory agencies (such as the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) and Food Standards Australia New Zealand) and leading scientific bodies that study the safety of the food supply from both a human consumption and environmental perspective have concluded that authorised GM crops and food ingredients produced from such crops are as safe as their conventional counterparts.

Context

We recognise that the use of GM technology in agriculture continues to be the subject of lively debate. Opponents have expressed worries about negative impacts on biodiversity, public health, the leading position of a few seed companies, and the dependency of farmers (especially smallholders) on the latter. Proponents stress that regulatory approved GM crops are safe and contribute to increasing farm income by reducing the use of fossil fuels and sometimes improving yields, which could in turn play an important role in feeding the planet’s growing population in a more sustainable manner.

Consumer views and acceptance differ across the world. While there is continued concern in Europe and some parts of Asia, in other regions such as the US or Latin America the use of food ingredients produced from GM crops is common.

Next to that, the global regulatory environment is increasingly complex as different rules apply, not only to the authorisation of GM crops (in terms of both cultivation and their use in food products), but also to the provision of information to the consumer.
For instance, approaches to the labelling of food ingredients produced from GM crops vary greatly. It is mandatory in about 60 countries, including the European Union, Russia, Turkey, Australia or Brazil. In the US, attempts to enact such a requirement in some states triggered a public debate about GM crops.

**Unilever’s position**

In line with our aspiration to make sustainable living commonplace, we believe that science and technology, used in a responsible manner in agriculture, hold the potential to help meet the world’s long-term food needs more sustainably.

**Commitment to safety**

As one of the largest consumer goods companies in the world, Unilever’s priority is to provide consumers with products that are safe, meet all regulatory requirements and fulfil our high standards for quality. Our commitment to safety and quality includes all of our food ingredients, whether produced from conventional crops or from GM crops authorised by regulatory bodies.

**Commitment to sustainable sourcing**

Unilever is committed to sourcing 100% of its agricultural raw materials sustainably by 2020. Under this commitment, we evaluate each of our agricultural raw materials for its potential to conform to the principles of Unilever’s Sustainable Agriculture Code and comply with our sustainable sourcing requirements. Our commitment applies equally to GM and non-GM crops.

**Commitment to transparency**

Unilever fundamentally supports the principle of transparency and the provision of information to consumers who want to know about the use of ingredients produced from GM crops.

In markets where there is a labelling requirement, Unilever will provide on-pack information in full compliance with the relevant legislation.

In markets where there is no regulatory framework for mandatory labelling, Unilever will work with industry stakeholders to support the voluntary provision of information via websites or consumer carelines to disclose the use of ingredients produced from GM crops in food products.

**Commitment to meeting consumer preferences**

At the heart of our business and our brands is a deep commitment to consumers. We recognise some have a preference for foods made to specific production standards, such as processes that do not use ingredients produced from GM crops. Where feasible we offer products that meet these preferences.