Submission of information on Socioeconomic Considerations according to Article 26 of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety

Sweden would like to submit the following experiences in taking socioeconomic considerations in decisions for allowing field trials of living modified organisms in response to CBD notification 2017-39.

The discussion about what constitutes a socioeconomic consideration is also ongoing in Sweden and different interpretations are still prevalent. The example described in this submission, the policy for co-existence between bee-keeping and cultivation of genetically modified plants, originates from an EU court judgement[[1]](#footnote-1) that honey containing pollen from genetically modified plants is regulated by EU legislation on genetically modified organisms. The purpose of this policy was to enable all actors to follow EU regulations on genetically modified organisms, and allow science to be performed with GM plants in the field, as well as the Swedish policy to consider conflicting societal interests when making decisions on field trials of genetically modified organisms. It is not clear or generally agreed that considering co-existence and conflicting societal interests in decisions regarding genetically modified organisms can be considered a socioeconomic consideration, as definitions of what constitute a socioeconomic consideration are still under development. Since co-existence and consideration of conflicting societal interests may be considered a socioeconomic consideration, we would like to submit the following case study for discussion.

When granting permission for carrying out field trials of living modified organism, the Swedish policy is to consider the needs of bee-keepers producing honey for human consumption. If the honey to be sold contains pollen from a genetically modified plant, this genetically modified plant must be approved as a product for human consumption (according to European Union regulation). As genetically modified plants in field trials are seldom approved for human consumption, it is important for bee-keepers to avoid pollen from field trials in their honey.

Thus the policy is that when granting permission for field trials, the Swedish Board of Agriculture, the competent authority for granting permission, assesses the probability that pollen from the field trial may enter honey. The Board of Agriculture sets conditions for the field trial that permit honey production in the area without risk of the honey containing pollen from the plants in the field trial.

The conditions for a field trial with genetically modified plants that may be attractive for bees, generally include a specified distance of 3 km between the field trial and a registered beehive, but this distance may be adjusted as needed. This is possible due to that the bee-keepers are requested to register the location of their beehives early in the season. Conditions for field trials with genetically modified plants that may be attractive to bees may also include;

* removing the flowers of the plant in the field trial,
* covering the field trial with insect net,
* in some cases growing plants (not genetically modified) that are very attractive for bees in a field near the field trial.

Another option is for the bee-keeper and the part responsible for the field trial to agree on moving the beehives away from the area while the plants in the field trial bloom.

To ensure the integrity of the process, applications for field trials are made public on the Board of Agriculture’s web site. Members of the general public, which also include bee-keepers, are invited to comment on the application. These comments are considered in the decision whether or not to allow the field trial and the conditions that may be set for allowing the field trial. The ensuing decision and the location of the field trial are also made public on the Board of Agriculture´s web site.

This policy has generally been successful in taking consideration to the needs of bee-keeping and honey production and continue to allow field trials without too much interference on their scientific value whilst alleviating some possible general concerns of consumers.

1. Court of Justice of the European Union Press release no 5/11,

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   | Advocate General’s Opinion in Case C-442/09, Karl Heinz Bablok and Others v Freistaat Bayern |

   <http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_CJE-11-5_en.htm> date of access: 20170615 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)