
CONTROVERSIAL CRITERION

GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS (GMOs)

Forum ETHIBEL position statement

Since the first genetically modified organism was created, the use of GMOs has been controversial with an on-going debate between opponents and proponents:

Opponents use arguments such as the following: the use of GMOs reduces biodiversity; it will lead to the development of more hazardous pesticides; and it will increase costs for farmers and the food industry.

Proponents use the arguments such as the following: GMOs increase agricultural productivity; they put less pressure on available land and water resources; and genetically modified plants and animals used in the medical industry contribute to human and animal health.

Given this debate with strong arguments on both sides, Forum ETHIBEL has decided to include this as a controversial criterion in its methodology.

Eligibility

As the use of certain GMOs can be beneficial while the use of other GMOs can be detrimental, it is important to make a case-by-case evaluation of each GMO to determine its impact. Companies that **produce GMOs, manufacture products that contain GMOs or distribute GMOs** will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. The criteria are as follows:

1. What is the GMO used for?
2. If the GMO is used in food production, does the GMO improve its nutritional value?
3. Are there controversies with the GMO related to possible negative health effects for animals and/or humans?
4. Are there controversies with the GMO related to negative environmental effects?
5. Does the use of the GMO have a negative influence on biodiversity?
6. Does the GMO lead to resistance to certain pesticides?
7. Does the GMO increase dependence on one company?

When in doubt, the precautionary principle applies.

Definition

A Genetically Modified Organism (GMO) is any organism whose genetic material has been altered by using genetic engineering techniques. Genetic modification means that genes are deleted, inserted or mutated in a certain species to obtain a certain objective, for example pest-resistant plants or high-yield milk cows.

The use of GMOs is allowed in some countries, like the United States. In the EU, the use of GMOs is allowed, but is strictly regulated¹.

¹ Directives 2001/18/EC, 1829/2003 and 1830/2003¹ stipulate that all companies that wish to introduce GMOs (seeds, food, and ingredients) in the EU must follow a rigid application process.