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Abstract

Genetically Enhanced Bt11 Sweet Maize from Syngenta

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Syngenta Bt11 sweet maize has built-in protection against the European corn borer, a devastating corn pest. This protection has been achieved through modern biotechnology. Two additional genes have been added:

A synthetic Bt gene {*CryIA(b)*}, which was derived from the common soil bacterium *Bacillus thuringiensis*, widely used as a biological control agent against various insect pests; and

A marker gene, {called *pat*}, which gives the plant a tolerance to phosphinothricine, the active ingredient of glufosinate ammonium herbicides. This gene is derived from the soil bacterium *Streptomyces viridochromogenes*.

Syngenta submitted a regulatory dossier, for the marketing of Bt11 sweet maize as food, under the Novel Food Regulation in November 1998. On April 17 of 2002, the European Union (EU) Scientific Committee on Food (SCF) adopted an opinion on the safety of Syngenta's genetically enhanced sweet maize. The opinion concluded "Bt11 sweet maize is as safe for human food use as its conventional counterparts." This decision marks the end of the scientific review of the file. The decision acknowledges the safety of genetically enhanced Bt11 sweet maize, and reflects the opinion of several other regulatory authorities worldwide, and the experiences in countries in which Bt11 sweet maize is already approved.

As the next step, the Commission will draft a proposal for a decision, which will be voted on by the Regulatory Committee, on which each Member State has a representative. If the European Union authorities approve Bt11 sweet maize, it would be possible to sell or import Bt11 sweet maize as food in the European Union. The food clearance-permit will not allow any cultivation of Bt11 sweet maize in the EU.