



WWF POSITION STATEMENT

WWF's position on genetically modified organisms (GMOs)

WWF does not promote or endorse the use of GMOs; applies a precautionary approach to the introduction of GMOs; and advocates the retention of non-GMO options for all relevant commodities.

WWF believes that a strong precautionary approach to environmental impacts of GMOs is necessary to evaluate risks and consequences, and respect minimum standards for preventing damage to the environment and biodiversity.

As the use of GMOs varies from country to country, WWF advocates a precautionary approach to environmental, economic and social impacts, and transparent monitoring of such impacts. WWF requests and expects governments and designated government authorities to run a rigorous case-by-case risk assessment process before approval for a GMO in a country; as well as on-going monitoring of GMO impacts – including their impacts relative to other varieties.

Before WWF engages with stakeholders that use GMOs, a common risk analysis framework to evaluate risks / benefits from any GMO with which it intersects in a specific place is applied. The assessment is informed by the Precautionary Principle and international protocols – particularly the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. WWF develops its strategy in each location based on this risk analysis.

In its work on sustainability standard setting for commodities that include GMOs, (such as the Roundtable on Responsible Soy, and the Better Cotton Initiative), WWF supports and promotes the development of tracts for non-GM varieties within credible standards. Doing so guarantees that non-GMO varieties remain an option; provides a comparative baseline for measuring the performance of GMO products, and impacts such as the use of pesticides; and ensures actors, including both producers and consumers, access to non GM products. WWF applies the same principle in its bilateral relations with companies.

WWF is working in a rapidly evolving global conservation landscape, and is therefore committed to periodic institutional re-evaluation of issues, policies, risks and opportunities for achieving conservation impacts.

February 2015 (extended without change from December 2012)

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BACKGROUND NOTES

WWF is a science-based conservation organization, with overarching goals aimed at conserving biodiversity and reducing humanity's footprint. Globally, WWF concentrates its work on a number of priority places where nature conservation is most urgent. A major threat to many of these priority places is unsustainable production of food, fibre and increasingly bioenergy – which results in loss of biodiversity, critical habitats and ecosystem services. Adequately addressing sustainable commodity production requires engaging with a wide range of stakeholders, including some that use genetically modified organisms (GMOs).

Several key issues define the GMO debate, including:

- Impacts on biodiversity and ecosystem health;
- Use of agro-chemicals;
- Land tenure, livelihoods and food security;
- Resource efficiency, land productivity and adaptation;
- Human health impacts;
- Product labelling and consumer choice.

Putting these issues into the context of our overall goals of halting biodiversity loss and reducing the ecological footprint is important for WWF.

WWF believes that the production of food, fibre and bioenergy must be made more sustainable – while reducing pressures and impacts on natural habitats and natural resources, enhancing biodiversity conservation and protecting ecosystems.

WWF recognizes that technological advances can help create benefits for the environment and society, but the benefits have to be clearly demonstrated and the risks avoided and/or limited.

WWF also recognizes that uptake of best agricultural practices is key to achieving our goals, providing these practices contribute to sustainable resource use in the long-term.

WWF further notes that modern genetic science and technology has improved the efficiency of selection-based breeding.

Genetic modification is one aspect of the broader genetics field and WWF recognizes the ongoing debate about a possible contribution of GMOs to sustainable development. GMOs include marker assisted breeding even when the material being used is from the same species, but is replicated artificially in planting materials for farmers. The incorporation of foreign genetic material into organisms, producing GMOs or transgenic organisms is more controversial.

WWF also notes that there is no international consensus on the risks or benefits from applications of GM technology. The assessment of GMOs and the accompanying research is subject not only to scientific interpretation, but also to differences depending on environmental, social and economic contexts, as well as agricultural systems and traditions.

EXPIRY

This Position Statement (originally agreed December 2012) has been extended without change for a further two years and now expires on 30 December 2016, at which time it will be subject to review and updating as required. If necessary, it will be reviewed and updated at any time in the interim should the need arise.

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