

SCIMAC

supply chain initiative on
modified agricultural crops

Code of Practice on the introduction of genetically modified crops

This Code of Practice has been developed to establish a consistent, industry-wide approach to the supply of information relating to genetically modified (GM) crops from seed to primary end-product, and to promote practical guidelines for the management of specific aspects of GM crops. This will provide the information required by those further along the food supply chain to manage storage and processing operations effectively, to conserve the value of the harvested commodity and to ensure appropriate record-keeping and onward transfer of information.

Introduction

Modern plant biotechnology extends the scope of conventional plant breeding. Techniques such as genetic modification (GM) offer improvements in crop production and utilisation, with potential benefits to agriculture, the food industry, consumers and the environment.

Good agricultural practice currently recognises the responsible use of pesticides, which applies equally to GM crops. In addition, growers should be aware of wider considerations relating to the protection of biodiversity and farmland wildlife via advisory groups such as LEAF and FWAG.

The provision of information relating to GM crops will play an important role in ensuring best practice is adopted by all those involved in the production, handling, storage, processing and marketing of these products.

An effective information delivery system along the food supply chain for UK-produced GM crops is also needed to provide consumer choice and satisfy consumer demands for information about the use of GM in food production. This Code of Practice provides the basis for identity preservation up to and including despatch of the harvested crop ex-farm.

The following basic principles shall apply:

All GM material entering the food chain must comply with legal requirements relating to environmental release, marketing consent and food safety.

All parties involved in this code must take steps to ensure that the information provided is accurate and presented in a clear, concise and readily understood format.

This Code of Practice will be subject to annual review.

Information Requirements

Plant breeders are required to identify and provide comprehensive information relating to GM crop varieties to comply with the requirements of statutory trials within the EU. This information is publicly available through independent published sources such as the EU Common Catalogue and national, recommended and descriptive lists.

To ensure best practice across all sectors of the industry, and to provide traceability for individual consignments of GM varieties, the consenting parties via SCIMAC recognise the need for successive transfer of supplementary information at strategic points along the food chain:

by seed merchants:

to market GM varieties and advise growers of any specific requirements when growing the crop;

by growers:

to manage seed handling and crop husbandry effectively, to ensure appropriate record-keeping and storage arrangements, and to market the harvested crop;

by merchants and wholesalers:

to ensure appropriate record-keeping and transfer of information during storage and onward distribution.

To comply with the requirements and objectives of this Code of Practice, the licensor of the GM technology and/or developer of the variety must ensure that the following information is available to growers before purchase of the variety – either directly or via the seed supply trade – in relation to each GM crop variety:

The variety is genetically modified
The nature of the modification(s)
Specific husbandry and management advice

Information Transfer – Seed Supplier to Farmer

A combination of communication routes will be required to ensure that the necessary information is available to the relevant personnel and in an appropriate format at each stage in the seed marketing and primary production process:

1. Variety Guides

Independent UK variety guides will identify which varieties have been developed using genetic modification and, in each case, the nature of the modification(s). Independent variety guides are available for each crop species. These include the annual Oilseeds Variety Handbook and Variety Leaflets for Fodder Beet, Forage Maize and Sugar Beet produced by NIAB in association with other independent organisations such as SAC and ADAS. These differ from the marketing literature often provided by seed suppliers.

2. Marketing Literature

Commercial sales and marketing material produced by the licensor of the GM technology and/or the developer of the variety must state clearly that a variety has been developed using genetic modification, and the nature of the modification(s). It must also provide basic advice on good husbandry and farm management practice, particularly where this differs from conventional crops, as well as details of where further advice can be obtained (eg Information Helpline).

3. Seed leaflet

All growers purchasing GM seed must receive an explanatory leaflet stating clearly that the variety has been developed using genetic modification and the nature of all modifications present within that variety, regardless of whether or not they are intrinsic to the husbandry of the crop. It must also provide basic management advice relating to handling, storage and transportation of the seed, as well as details of where additional management and husbandry advice can be obtained (eg Information Helpline).

4. Seed package identifier

In addition to the official seed label, a visual identifier exclusive to GM varieties must be displayed on each package of GM seed and any outer packaging containing multiple packages of GM seed. This will help to ensure that the seed is handled and stored on-farm according to best management practice, and to inform farm personnel that supplementary management and husbandry advice is available.

5. Information Helpline

Both the licensor of the GM technology and, where applicable, the variety owner, will provide a telephone information service to answer specific requests for more detailed information from growers and the agricultural supply trade relating to the product and its use.

harvesting and on-farm storage. According to buyer specifications, this may require physical segregation of harvested GM crops from different sources or mixing with non-GM varieties. Where harvested produce of GM and non-GM varieties are mixed together they must be treated as a GM crop.

The importance of good agricultural practice, including record-keeping and identification of varieties, is recognised by growers as a vital component in meeting the quality assurance demands of the food industry and, ultimately, of consumers. On-farm records relating to GM varieties must be retained for a minimum of seven years.

The NFU and UKASTA will continue to communicate the importance of record-keeping to members. Other information supplied to farmers and agricultural suppliers in relation to GM crop varieties must also highlight the significance of record-keeping in safeguarding the value and integrity of the harvested commodity, and in transferring information further along the food chain.

Basic guidelines for good agricultural practice when growing GM crops with specific agronomic traits are being developed. Summary guidelines, where available, must be followed in combination with variety-specific information.

Currently available from SCIMAC are:

'Guidelines for Growing Newly Developed Herbicide Tolerant Crops'.

Good Agricultural Practice

To comply with the requirements of this Code of Practice, each GM crop must be identifiable by variety and trait at all stages, from initial seed stock through production,

Information Transfer – Ex-farm

When transported off the farm to the merchants and wholesalers, each GM crop consignment must be accompanied by a post-harvest declaration which must include the variety name(s).

The provision of such information should be maintained during subsequent transportation of consignments. Those involved with GM crops post-farm should address the issues of continued transfer of information and traceability of such crops. In addressing these and other points attention should be paid to the basic principles contained within this document.

Information Flow for UK-Grown GM Crops

The flow chart opposite identifies the strategic points along the crop-based food supply chain at which information transfer will be required to ensure the aims of this Code of Practice are fulfilled. The darker shaded section illustrates the role of this Code of Practice, which fulfils the information requirements of the primary supply chain from seed supplier to primary end-product.

Organisations further along the food chain, from primary processors to food retailers, are encouraged to ensure that the successive transfer of information is maintained. This will enable the industry to comply with statutory food labelling requirements, and to provide supplementary consumer information on a voluntary basis.

