

PREPARATIONS FOR THE 1999 MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE

Proposal of Japan on Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs)

Communication from Japan

The following communication, dated 4 October 1999, has been received from the Permanent Mission of Japan.

1. There has been much discussion on GMOs in international fora, including the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius Commission, as well as through the Convention of Biological Diversity. The Communiqué of the Cologne Summit issued this June stated that the results of the examination made through the expert meetings of the OECD on biotechnology and food safety should be reported by the time of the next Summit.

2. Under such circumstances, it has become necessary for the WTO to discuss the issue of trade on genetically modified products, such as their relations with the WTO agreements, while considering on the results and the progress made through discussions in these international fora and elsewhere. In discussing issues related to GMOs, due consideration should be given to the following points:

- (1) the great potential of genetic engineering should be appropriately acknowledged;
- (2) the impact of genetic engineering and its application on the environment and human health should be fully evaluated, based on the most advanced scientific knowledge and expertise; and
- (3) consumers' concerns on the use of genetic engineering should be addressed appropriately.

3. In light of the above-mentioned points, Japan has been taking the following measures on GMOs:

- (1) Actively promoting the research and development for an appropriate and effective use of genetic engineering.
- (2) Checking the safety of GMOs in accordance with the relevant guidelines so as not to cause any damage to the environment and human health.
- (3) Adopting a policy which aims at introducing a labelling system for genetically modified food, while securing the safety of GMOs; after spending two years in deliberation based on the wide-ranging opinions from various sectors of the society,

the policy was adopted from a viewpoint of taking feasible, reliable and appropriate measures for providing consumers with information.

4. In its proposal for the next WTO agricultural negotiations submitted this June, Japan proposed to establish an appropriate forum to address new issues, including GMOs. Such a forum would hold discussions from a broad perspective in order to analyse the current situation of GMOs, to examine the issues which need to be addressed and to consider their relationship with existing WTO agreements.

5. The proposal has been made based on two reasons. First, the new challenges, such as GMOs with a wide range of applications, require examination from a broad perspective as these are related, not only to the Agreement on Agriculture, but also to other WTO agreements. Second, it was deemed necessary to identify the issues to be addressed in connection with the relevant WTO agreements.

6. As a forum for such discussions from a broad perspective (hereinafter referred to as "the examination group for new issues including GMOs"), it would be appropriate to form a group as, for example, a sub-group of an independent negotiating group on agriculture to identify topics on food-related matters of GMOs. It is appropriate for this sub-group to deliberate within a reasonable period of time.

7. While the topics for examination in the above examination should be further considered, the following, for example, could be included as possible topics for examination.

- (1) What is the current situation of Members with regard to their evaluation on the safety of GMOs and the labelling of food containing GMOs? In order to have discussions on these subjects, how can the relevant topics of discussion be identified?
 - (2) What would be the appropriate way for the WTO to deal with the contents and outcomes of discussions of other international fora?
 - (3) Whether the relevant WTO agreements, such as SPS, TBT and TRIPs, which could be related to GMOs matters, are capable of responding to the matters? If not, what are the problems?
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