

Novel foods and novel food ingredients

1992/0426(COD) - 16/10/1996

Are novel foods, by which is meant genetically modified products (which could affect soybean seeds, sugar beet or tomatoes), different from traditional foodstuffs, and if so to what extent? This was the question that lay at the heart of the first exchange of views of the previous evening between delegations representing Parliament and the Council, sitting in the Conciliation Committee. Parliament wanted to see a form of foodstuffs labelling that would inform consumers of any characteristic or property that distinguished novel foods or novel food ingredients from equivalent existing foods or food ingredients. The Council took the view that this information was only justified when there was a substantial difference between the novel food and the conventional foodstuff. It intended referring back to the Conciliation Committee, under the codecision procedure, in order to obtain a compromise text for a proposal for a regulation from Parliament and the Council concerning the placing on the Community market of novel foods and novel food ingredients. On 12 March Parliament adopted at second reading six amendments to the common position that had been agreed by the Council on 23 October 1995. Compromise proposals were currently being examined and it was possible that the delegations would reach an agreement in the weeks ahead. The regulation was aimed at ensuring that novel foods and novel food ingredients posed no risk to the health of consumers or to the environment and would be subject to a detailed labelling system. It would also define the procedures to be put in place at European level in order to provide for the placing of such products on the Community market. Genetic manipulation was only to be permitted when it was designed to improve the taste, flavour or shelf life of the products concerned, or to protect them from attack by insects and herbicides.