The impact of biotechnology in agriculture

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The committee approved the proposed legislative resolution on the impact of biotechnology on agriculture almost unanimously. Given the anticipated population explosion, with the world's population of 5.8 billion expected to double in 30 years' time and the fact that there is little margin to increase the world's arable land of 1.5 billion hectares (as 90% of the potential land is already being farmed), modern biotechnology has a key role to play as far as the expected progress and development requirements of the 21st century are concerned. In the agricultural sector, biotechnology may fulfil this role and help to feed the world's population, provided that vital natural resources are used sparingly and sustainably. The rapporteur, Mrs Hedwig Keppelhoff-Wiechert (PPE, D) used this clear, solid starting point to develop this subject and analyse the pros and cons of using biotechnology in agriculture. The draft resolution adopted voices her concern about sustainable and environmentally-friendly production and emphasises the most urgent economic aspects, including in terms of preventing the risk of monopolies in this new technological sector, and even outlines the legal framework for any form of exploitation of genetic engineering. The rapporteur points out in this respect that European legislation will need to adapt to the rate of legal developments in other countries, especially the United States and Japan, and that the Commission should examine whether there is a need for harmonisation with Japanese and US legislation and seek to establish corresponding international standards, while ensuring that the level of protection they offer does not fall below what has been already achieved. In calling for provision to be made in the fifth research programme for research into "biotechnology in agriculture and food production", Mrs Keppelhoff-Wiechert stated that, if the conditions and principles set out in her report were followed, innovative and responsible use could be made of the potential of biotechnology in Europe.