The future of the biotechnology industry

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The committee adopted the by John PURVIS (EPP-ED, UK) on the future of the biotechnology industry in the EU. The committee was critical of government measures to block or delay authorisation of genetically modified (GM) products for reasons not based on objective scientific opinion. It believed that the European Food Safety Authority should restore consumer confidence and reduce international disputes and that it should have overall responsibility for the approval of GM products. At the same time, the committee called for obligatory mutagenicity, carcinogenicity and toxicity tests to be carried out on transgenic foods before they were placed on the market. The report also stressed the importance of informing the public about safety checks and the extent of any risk. It emphasised the right of EU citizens to information about food products and called on the Commission to lay down more comprehensive rules on labelling of GM organisms and to allow "de minimis exceptions" only where these were technically unavoidable. The committee called on the Commission and the Member States to support research into biotechnological applications offering clear social or environmental benefits such as the development of genetically modified micro-organisms for use in water purification, soil restoration, replacing dangerous chemicals currently in use, and developing sustainable and environmentally friendly energy sources including biogas, hydrogen and ethanol. It believed that biotech applications could help reduce agricultural, environmental and health problems in developing countries and therefore considered that these countries should be encouraged to develop their own biotech industries. The report also backed the principle of involving developing countries in the establishment of priorities for relevant EU research programmes and in trade debates. Finally, the committee called on Member States and the Commission to organise public fora on biotechnology in order to discuss issues relating to biotechnology in such a way that all viewpoints were respected.