The impact of biotechnology in agriculture

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In adopting the report by Mrs Hedwig KEPPELHOFF-WIECHERT (PPE, D) on the impact of biotechnology on agriculture, the European Parliament calls on the Member States and applicant countries to take policy decisions capable of ensuring that modern biotechnology makes significant contributions to feeding the world's population and ensuring that vital natural resources are used sparingly and sustainably. It stresses that, for the potential of biotechnology to be fully and safely exploited, the best possible system of tests and checks must be created to enable innovative and, at the same time, responsible development of biotechnology in Europe, taking into account ethical aspects, the consequences for nature and the environment, the health and well being of humans and the consequences for individual animals. It stipulates that the use of genetically modified organisms must not damage health or the environment under any circumstances and calls on the Commission to ensure that the European legal framework for biotechnology and genetic engineering offers a high level of protection against harmful side effects and to ascertain as to whether there is a need for harmonization with Japanese and US legislation and to seek to establish corresponding international standards, while ensuring that the level of protection they offer does not fall below what has been already achieved. Calling for environmentally friendly production methods, Parliament stresses that the use of varieties which genetic modification has made resistant to certain diseases and pests could help reduce the use of chemical plant protection products. It recognizes that genetic engineering can improve the capacity of plants to assimilate nutrients, which could reduce the use of fertilizers and the leaching of nutrients into the ground water. There may, however, be a potential risk of certain genetically modified organisms destroying biological balances in nature and doing harm to the biotope. Taking the view that it will only be possible to feed the world's fast growing population in future if agricultural production is sustainably increased. Parliament considers that this could be achieved using soft technologies in a responsible manner. Parliament points out the genetic engineering offers new opportunities to agriculture enabling it to improve the Community of raw materials for the production of foodstuffs with a view to improving food supplies. It calls for measures to restore consumer confidence by ensuring that genetically-engineering foodstuffs and feeding stuffs are clearly labelled and calls on the Commission to submit a proposal for harmonizing the costs incurred in connection with authorization procedures and the conduct of release tests. Finally, Parliament calls for biotechnology to be maintained as a separate specific research sector within the fifth research programme and would also like to see 'biology in agriculture and food production' included as a separate activity within that sector. It calls for the promotion of information of innovative technologies with specific references to 'green' biotechnology.