



Organización Internacional del Café  
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Organisation Internationale du Café

WP Board No. 963/05

6 January 2005  
Original: English

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Genetically modified coffee

Executive Board  
25 – 27 January 2005  
London, England

**Draft terms of reference for a seminar  
on genetically modified coffee**

## **Background**

The attached document contains draft terms of reference for a seminar on genetically modified coffee, as provided for in the programme of activities for 2004/05. Appropriate speakers will be identified and contacted once the terms of reference have been agreed.

## **Action**

The Executive Board is requested to consider and approve the attached draft terms of reference, and to suggest names of speakers who could be invited to participate in the seminar.

## **Introduction**

With the remarkable progress in science, many related social, political, economical, environmental and ethical concerns are emerging as global issues. One key area of scientific research is the development of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs). Cultivation of genetically modified crops has expanded rapidly since they were grown commercially in the United States of America in 1996 (the first GMOs were developed in 1965 and field trials and controls took place between 1986 and 1993). In 2002, the area planted with GMOs worldwide was 58.7 million hectares, with the greatest increase seen in developing countries. What are GMOs and how do they impact on the development of foods and commodities such as coffee? The term 'Genetically Modified Organism' refers to any living organism (animal or plant, micro-organism, etc) whose genetic structure has been artificially modified by adding or replacing one or more genes. The basic principle is the transfer of one or more genes to the target organism to give it a new property, the correction of a defective gene or the removal of a particular trait. Generally the gene or genes are taken from another species. Both molecular biology and cellular biology are involved in genetic modification.

A number of large companies have initiated substantial research programmes, field trials and plant development in this area. The main groups are Monsanto, Bayer, Dupont, Seminis and Syngenta, while the leading GM crop producers are the USA, Argentina, Canada and China. To what extent do these GM products contribute to development and what are their consequences? More specifically, what contribution can genetically modified coffee make to improving farmers' conditions? What are the benefits for the entire coffee industry? And what are the risks associated with it, noticeably the impact on the environment, human health and farm economics? In other words, how relevant are GMOs for coffee producing countries? Although there appears to be no genetically modified coffee currently offered in the market, this issue has been raised in the context of the Common Code for the Coffee Community project, and the proposal for the seminar was approved by the Council in the ICO programme of activities for 2004/05 (document EB-3863/04).

## **Objectives**

The goal of the seminar is firstly to inform Members about the issue of GMOs in general and coffee in particular. It will contribute to raising Members' awareness of the issue in order to assess the concept and facilitate well informed choices. As we all know, the appearance of genetically modified foods in the marketplace has resulted in a storm of public debate, scientific discussion, and media coverage. The proposed seminar will give an opportunity to all stakeholders involved in GMO programmes at various levels and those who oppose them to share their experience. The seminar will therefore, involve participants from Member countries, NGOs representatives, business people and academics, industry, research institutes etc.

## **Proposed structure**

The following issues will be covered by the seminar:

### *Definitions and key issues relating to GM crops and GM coffee*

The introductory session will look at definitions of GM crops in general and GM coffee in particular, with a contribution from a specialist scientist.

### *Development of GM coffee: various experiences*

Speakers from research institutions and the GM industry will share their experiences of the development of GM coffee.

### *Impact of GM crops in general and GM coffee in particular*

Speakers with expertise on health issues, and NGOs working in the field of sustainability will outline the impact of GM crops and GM coffee in relation to health and to sustainability, including environmental and socio-economic aspects.

### *Challenges and opportunities for coffee producing countries*

Representatives of the coffee industry in coffee producing countries will explore the opportunities and the potential benefits and problems for coffee producing countries

### *Issues of labelling, traceability and economic impact*

In this section, a representative of the coffee industry in a consuming country will highlight some of the evolving patenting issues relating to the labelling, traceability and economic impact in importing countries.

### *Current legislation*

A representative of an international organization such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) will report on current legislation.

### **Proposed speakers**

It is proposed that organizations from the following categories could be approached to provide speakers:

- Research institutions (e.g. CIRAD, CAB International (CABI), EMBRAPA,)
- GM Industry (e.g. Monsanto, Syngenta, Aventis, Dupont, Bayer, Integrated Coffee Technologies Inc.)
- Health professionals (e.g. Food Safety Association)
- Non Governmental Organizations (e.g. Greenpeace, Oxfam)
- Coffee industry in consuming Members (e.g. European Coffee Federation)
- Coffee industry/farmer associations in producing Members (e.g. Brazil)
- International organizations (e.g. the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), International Plant Genetic Resources Institute (IPGRI))
- Specialist media (e.g. New Scientist);