

3/4 of Swedish farmers reject GMOs

Swedish farmers remain solidly opposed to GMOs despite recent moves by major farm cooperatives to introduce GMO feed and GMO crops. In an opinion poll published 20 January in the farm journal ATL, 74 % of farmers say they will not consider growing GMOs, while 68 % say they will not use GMO feed. Asked whether they would eat GMO products themselves, 64 % say no.

The poll has been repeated a number of times over the past ten years, and acceptance of GMOs has only changed marginally over time. The figures may even underestimate GMO resistance, as the poll only covered farmers with 20 hectares or more, and smaller farmers are likely more negative.

All Swedish animal feed has been non-GMO until the end of 2005, based on voluntary agreements in the dairy, meat, and poultry sectors. After a policy change late 2005, the cooperative Swedish Meats, with 2/3 of the market, will now start to accept GMO-fed animals for slaughter. The dairy industry will however remain non-GMO, despite strong pressure from the market leader, Arla Foods, to accept GMO feed. Danish-Swedish Arla allows GMO feed in Denmark, but not in Sweden, putting them in an awkward position when products are exchanged between the two markets.

Because most Swedish beef comes from combined dairy/beef operations, GMO feed will likely not have much immediate impact in the beef sector either, while some pork and poultry producers are more likely to jump at the opportunity. Some smaller meat companies have however already confirmed that they will remain non-GMO. Likewise, the growing integrated production (IP) concept Svenskt Sigill (Swedish Seal) has no intention of changing its non-GMO policy.

Swedish plant breeder Svalöf Weibull, co-owned by farm cooperative Lantmännen and German chemicals transnational BASF, has invested heavily in GMO breeding over the past ten years. A starch-modified potato is among the first candidates for EU cultivation approval, strongly supported by the Swedish government. Although the starch is intended only for industrial use, the potato pulp from processing would be used for animal feed.

Source: ATL, Lantbrukets Affärstidning, 20 January 2006  
<http://www.atl.nu/Article.jsp?article=33408>