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BIOTECH 3**

NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	AOB item for the meeting of the "Agriculture and Fisheries" Council of 9 and 10 December 2024: The potential of biotechnology within the agri-food sector – <i>Information from Denmark and Spain, supported by Czechia, Estonia, Finland, The Netherlands, Portugal and Sweden</i>

With the Commission's Communication on Boosting the Biotechnology and Biomanufacturing in the EU from March 2024 and the political guidelines for the European Commission 2024-2029 a Biotech Act is awaited. There is great potential in biotechnology, not least within the agri-food sector, where it can help solve some of the challenges the sector is facing regarding sustainable food production as more food can be produced with less input. A strong biotech-industry in the EU will also help ensure a more robust food and feed supply, enhance competitiveness and potentially create new jobs. The Draghi report on the future of European competitiveness underlines the importance of strengthening innovation in order for the EU to keep up with its competitors, which are also key elements in the recommendations from the Strategic Dialogue on the future of EU agriculture. The innovative biotechnical solutions within the agri-food sector should therefore be at the heart of the preparatory work on a Biotech Act.

Many of the biotechnical solutions used today are based on old techniques and nature-based solutions that have been used in food production for centuries, e.g., in the fermentation of milk to produce yoghurt, by use of yeast in the production of bread and in the fermentation of vegetables to increase their durability. Many products which are considered traditional today, were once innovative. European food culture would not have been the same if the potential of nature's own tools, such as microorganisms, enzymes, and bacteria had not been discovered.

Knowledge and techniques from the past continue to play a role in today's food and feed production and in the development of new sustainable products and processes. Biotechnical solutions are relevant for the entire value chain. It can help ensure crop resilience and plant protection, increase resource efficiency, reduce food loss and waste etc. Some proposals are already paving the way for further innovation, such as the proposal on plants developed with new genomic techniques.

It is however important that EU creates a prosperous environment for the industry. At the Council meeting (Agriculture and Fisheries) on 18 September 2023 and again on 27 May 2024, Denmark supported by several member states raised the need for a more innovation-friendly regulation in the agri-food sector – including the biotechnology sector – without compromising environmental or food safety.

An important first step is the Commission's anticipated study on how relevant EU-legislation can be further streamlined which could constitute a starting point for a reform of the EU's regulatory framework. A number of regulatory barriers limit the marketing of new bio-based solutions. It is important that these barriers are reduced and simplified as much as possible whilst maintaining the proper level of protection in order to enhance the attractiveness of the EU when it comes to research and development, production, and post-production activities. This will be for the common good of the EU.