

## **Failure on GM crops could ruin livestock industry, EU farmers warn**

By Andrew Bounds in Brussels

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Europe's livestock industry could be decimated without greater use of genetically modified crops, farmers warned yesterday after European Union agriculture ministers failed yet again to agree whether to allow imports of five biotech crops intended for animal feed.

The European Commission, the bloc's executive, is entitled to rubber-stamp the applications to import four types of maize and one type of potato into the EU.

However, Copa-Cogeca, which represents the EU's farmers, said that with feed prices rising and suppliers in the Americas increasingly planting GM seeds, the industry faced ruin without a speedier approval process. Approvals must first go to national governments, which rarely agree.

"It takes two to four years to approve a GM crop in Europe, 15 months in the US. We cannot compete," said Simon Michel-Berger, Copa-Cogeca's spokesman.

Pig rearers are already struggling, he said. Feed costs have risen by 50 per cent but prices have fallen 8 per cent. Without help - including export refunds and subsidised storage - up to a fifth of producers could give up by the end of the year.

David Hill, of the EU biotech farmers' network, said poultry production was increasingly moving to Thailand and Brazil. He said there were 18 crops awaiting approval for cultivation and 49 for import, and farmers were frustrated by the delay.

The EU has approved only about a dozen crops amid consumer fears of so-called "Frankenfoods". Just one, an insect-resistant maize, can be planted in the EU. France, Austria and Hungary have banned even that.

The Commission has pledged to speed up the process after losing a World Trade Organisation case against the US. Washington has granted a period of grace but could press for sanctions if the situation is not resolved soon.

The Commission is likely to approve soon the four insect-resistant maize types, including three developed by Monsanto, the US biotech company. But it faces an internal battle over the potato Amfora, made by BASF, the chemicals group. Byproducts of the potato can be used in animal feed but it also creates resistance to some important antibiotics, environmentalists say.