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Brussels, 21 April 2021

Dear Dr. Jégou,

Thank you for your letter of 28 February 2021[1] addressed to President von der Leyen, concerning your views on the potential of gene editing in production animals for prophylaxis of significant panzootic infectious diseases. President von der Leyen has asked me to reply on her behalf.

In your letter, you urge the European Commission to review and adjust the European regulations taking into account animal production in order to facilitate critical research in the European Union on gene editing of production animals.

The Council of the European Union highlighted that the ruling of the Court of Justice of the European Union on new mutagenesis techniques[2] raised practical questions, which have consequences for many sectors, and requested the Commission to carry out a study on the status of new genomic techniques.

This study will not only assess issues related to the implementation of the legislation, as interpreted by the Court, but will also elaborate on possible consequences for different sectors, including production animals. The study will further examine the potential of new genomic techniques (NGTs) to improve sustainability along the food chain, one of the objectives of the Green Deal and the Farm to Fork Strategy. In addition, the study will consider potential benefits and concerns related to products resulting from NGTs.

[1] Our reference Ares(2021)1964572
[2] Judgment of the Court of Justice of 25 July 2018, Confédération paysanne and Others v Premier ministre and Ministre de l'agriculture, de l'agroalimentaire et de la forêt, C-528/16, ECLI:EU:C:2018:583.

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For the elaboration of the study, the Commission consulted European Union-level organisations and associations that have been involved, could be impacted, or have shown interest on new genomic techniques. The Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE) was one of the consulted stakeholders that delivered its contribution. The study will also build on contributions from the Member States, the European Food Safety Authority and the Joint Research Centre.

The study will be finalised by the end of April 2021, as planned. The Council requested the Commission to also submit a proposal accompanied by an impact assessment, if appropriate, or otherwise to inform the Council on other measures required as a follow-up to the study. This follow-up will be based on the results of the study and has not been decided yet.

I would encourage you to continue to actively contribute to the discussion on the future of biotechnology in the European Union and provide your views on how innovative techniques can be safely used to address current societal challenges

Yours sincerely,