

EFSA: a playing field for biotech industry

Experts from the European Food Safety Authority are collaborating with companies such as Monsanto
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There is close collaboration between experts on the GMO Panel of the European Food Safety Authority, EFSA, and the biotech industry. The chair of the GMO expert panel which is dealing with risk assessment of genetically engineered plants, Harry Kuiper, and a second expert from the same panel, Gijs Kleter, have for years been working with the International Life Science Institute (ILSI). They cooperate with representatives of companies such as Monsanto, Dupont, Dow AgroSciences, Syngenta and Bayer, within projects that aim to soften criteria for risk assessment for genetically engineered plants.

Several complaints about collaboration between EFSA and corporations have been made public in the last few months. At the end of September it was made public that Diána Bánáti, a member of the management board at EFSA, was also active in ILSI. After public discussion, Banati resigned from her tasks at ILSI. In another case, the head of the secretary of the GMO panel, Suzy Renckens, moved directly to the Syngenta company after leaving EFSA, without the authority imposing any restrictions. New accusations were made about the conflict of interest in the assessment of toxic chemicals, a matter in which ILSI also plays a decisive role.

In the opinion of Testbiotech the cases of Kuiper and Kleter imply a severe conflict of interests. "Harry Kuiper was the head of the GMO expert panel right from the start. He was instrumental in developing the guidance documents which form the basis for the risk assessment. Just before he started at EFSA in 2003, he was working with ILSI and the biotech industry in a project to define criteria for risk assessment. He has continued to work with ILSI until today. EFSA's credibility is very much at stake, because this blatant cooperation has been tolerated for so many years," says Christoph Then at Testbiotech. "It looks like as if the biotech industry has succeeded in turning EFSA into their playing field with the help of ILSI."

ILSI is a US organisation which deals with issues of food safety and related legal regulations. The institution was at the centre of controversial debates because the WHO complained about ILSI's close relationship with the tobacco industry. Where biotechnology is concerned, ILSI works with a so-called "Task Force", that consists completely of members of industry. A group of experts works in close cooperation with this Task Force to prepare reports that are used to influence decision making at a political level. Harry Kuiper and Gijs Kleter are both among the authors of these reports.

Testbiotech is now investigating in detail the extent to which the work of EFSA has been influenced by the ideas developed by ILSI and corporations. Several relevant documents have been identified and subjected to further checks, and the results will be presented at a media conference on 1st of December in Munich. "We are deeply concerned about our findings concerning the work of EFSA. It clearly shows the need to support independent risk research. We are urging for research and risk assessment to be reorganised with broader public involvement. The industry should be stopped from manipulating politicians, authorities and scientists."

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Further information: [See first pages of an ILSI report as an example of cooperation between EFSA´s experts such as Harry Kuiper and Gijs Kleter and the biotech industry](#) [3]

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