
The double standards of EFSA

Bias in assessing scientific evidence for risks of genetically engineered plants

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Munich

In a new backgrounder, Testbiotech shows that the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) uses double standards in assessing scientific publications. According to an analysis presented today, the authority applies differing standards to assess risks of genetically engineered plants and EFSA's findings appear to be influenced by assumptions.

Recently published research on long term animal feeding trials using genetically engineered maize (NK603) and the herbicide Roundup. The scientists identified signals for severe health impacts in rats (Séralini et al. 2012). The results were rejected by EFSA for not meeting scientific standards such as, for example, those set out by the OECD.

However, detailed analysis shows that on a number of occasions in the past, EFSA has accepted publications that were not in accordance with the scientific standards now being used by EFSA to criticise the French study. The results from these previous studies did not identify health risks and were adopted without criticism. This inconsistency suggests that EFSA is 'cherry picking' when it comes to which scientific standards it chooses to apply.

"The way publications are assessed by EFSA seems to be biased by an assumption that products like genetically engineered plants should be regarded as being safe", says Christoph Then of Testbiotech. "It looks like EFSA is using the debate about scientific standards to defend their own previous opinions which concluded that there are no risks for human health."

According to Testbiotech, the scientific standards used in the feeding study by Séralini et al. (2012) are higher than those used in previous studies, even though the recent French study has some weakness in methodology. In conclusion, the results should be taken seriously and be a starting point for further investigations. Given that consumers could be exposed to the controversial products on a daily basis, a high level of precaution is necessary.

In view of the debate arising around the French study, Testbiotech is urging that the standards used in recent years for the risk assessment of genetically engineered plants and pesticides should be revised and reshaped in order to achieve a higher level of protection for consumers and the environment. Furthermore, independent risk research should be given much higher priority in EU research programs.

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