

Genetically engineered soybeans: EFSA withholding crucial documents

Testbiotech is concerned about risk assessment being ‘doctored’

12 December 2017 / The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) is withholding access to data from feeding trials with genetically engineered soybeans. Testbiotech is concerned that the real health risks from consumption of these soybeans are being concealed. The plants produced by Bayer and Dow AgroSciences each have resistance to three different herbicides, including glyphosate. In analysing documents, Testbiotech became aware of inconsistencies in regard to the feeding trials performed by the US company Dow and, therefore, requested access to the relevant data several weeks ago. However, contrary to its usual response, EFSA did not yet provide access. Instead, according to a letter received from the EU Commission yesterday, the import of the soybeans might be allowed very soon.

“There are indications that the genetically engineered soybeans used in feeding studies with rats were sprayed with much less glyphosate than usually applied in agricultural practice. We are concerned that this may be an intentional concealment of the actual risks to health from consumption of these soybeans,” says Christoph Then for Testbiotech.

According to the EU Commission, the health risks associated with genetically engineered soybeans can be assessed separately and independently of any herbicides they are resistant to. Testbiotech has rejected this approach on the grounds that it is inadequate and misleading. Testbiotech has further demanded to stop EU approval for these plants.

“The risks associated with the genetically engineered soybeans cannot be assessed in isolation from the herbicides to which they have been made resistant. In accordance with the guidelines for EU risk assessment, the plants have to be sprayed with the herbicides they are resistant to. But if the herbicides are not tested on the plants in realistic conditions, the risk assessment is flawed,” Christoph Then states.

If the plants are sprayed with less herbicide in the field trials than would be usual in normal farming practice, this will not only influence the amount of herbicide residues from spraying. It can also influence changes in plant composition, which is dependent on the dosage of herbicides sprayed onto the plants. These changes can cause health risks by, for instance, increasing the effects of allergens or phytoestrogens. These risks were neither assessed under pesticide regulation, nor under GMO regulation.

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Further information:

Letter from the EU Commission: www.testbiotech.org/node/2117

Answer from Testbiotech: www.testbiotech.org/node/2118

Updated background on the risks of genetically engineered soybeans:
www.testbiotech.org/node/2066

Video clip: www.testbiotech.org/en/limits-to-biotech/toxic-soy