

Will EU Commission allow import of new Baysanto 'maize monster'?

Genetically engineered maize is super-resistant to herbicides and produces six insecticidal toxins

22 October 2018 / EU Member States will today vote on whether a new genetically engineered (GE) maize that is super-resistant to the herbicides glyphosate and glufosinate and produces six insecticides can be imported. The maize is produced by crossing five different GE plants. Bayer wants approval for import and usage in food and feed. The health impacts resulting from the specific combination of potential toxic substances were not investigated.

The GE maize was produced by Monsanto, which is now owned by Bayer that bought up the US company. The maize is part of a business strategy to market the herbicide and patented seeds as a package: the plants inherit duplicated genes for glyphosate and glufosinate resistance and each of the herbicides can therefore be sprayed at higher dosages. As a result, in addition to the insecticidal proteins produced in the plants, the harvested kernels may have a high load of herbicide residues from spraying.

The potential detrimental effects on health from the consumption of food and feed derived from these maize plants were not tested in any feeding study. The EU Commission and the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) are of the opinion that in general such combinatorial effects do not require investigation.

“If this maize is allowed for import it would be another example of consistent irresponsibility in dealing with the risks by failing to give priority to the protection of health and the environment. Instead, international trade and corporate interests are being given a free ride,” Christoph Then says for Testbiotech. “Despite a majority of EU Member States being against the approval, the EU Commission is likely to give green light.”

In an initial preliminary vote, fourteen Member States voted against the import and three others abstained. Already in the past, the EU Commission has allowed the import of GE plants that contain a combination of potentially health damaging compounds, without investigating the health effects. Previous examples are the soybean “Intacta” and a maize called “SmartStax” which was produced by crossing four GE maize plants.

Testbiotech sees the need for working more intensively on these issues: last Wednesday, the Advocate General of the European Court of Justice gave his opinion on a legal case (C-82/17P) started by Testbiotech and other organisations. Their aim is to make a much more detailed investigation of risks posed by such plants mandatory. According to the statement made by the Advocate General, this attempt is likely to fail. If this opinion is confirmed by the court ruling, Testbiotech sees the need to raise more public awareness: “It could be quite difficult to explain specific failures in the risk assessment of GE plants to the EU court judges. Nevertheless, these problems have to be solved,” Christoph Then concludes.

Contact:

Christoph Then, tel. +49 0151 54638040, info@testbiotech.org

Further information:

Testbiotech opinion on maize MON 87427 x MON 89034 x 1507 x MON 88017 x 59122:

<https://www.testbiotech.org/node/2116>