



### **Testbiotech EU Newsletter 3/2016 (November 2016)**

This newsletter provides an overview of current developments in the EU and related Testbiotech activities. The newsletter is published every three months and more often where appropriate. It is supported by the Software AG Foundation.

---

Send a comment or subscribe: [info@testbiotech.org](mailto:info@testbiotech.org)

You can also find the newsletter at: [www.testbiotech.org/en/eu\\_news](http://www.testbiotech.org/en/eu_news)

Unsubscribe: [eu\\_news\\_en-leave@testbiotech.org](mailto:eu_news_en-leave@testbiotech.org)

---

**Most important topics: Complaint against EU authorisation for 'toxic soybeans' / Genetically engineered maize can give rise to superweeds / International research project / Golden Rice: Nobel Prize laureates caught up in sales campaign for biotech company?**

### **Overview of Topics**

#### **Current Issues and Activities**

- Testbiotech complaint against the EU authorisation for 'toxic soybeans'
- Genetically engineered maize can give rise to superweeds
- Conflicts of interest in EU risk research: EU Ombudsman calls for more transparency
- New Testbiotech report on genetic engineering of animals and animal experiments
- Testbiotech comment on maize Bt11 × 59122 × MIR604 × 1507 × GA21
- Testbiotech comment on soybean 305423 x 40-3-2

#### **Scientific news**

- Independent scientists set up international research project
- EFSA caught up in massive conflicts of interest whilst at the same time dismissing scientific findings

#### **News from EFSA**

- EFSA opinion on cotton GHB119
- EFSA opinion on teosinte
- EFSA opinion on soybean 305423 x 40-3-2
- EFSA opinion on a publication by Hofmann et al. (2016)
- Stakeholder event on guidelines for the evaluation of allergenicity of genetically engineered plants

#### **Other**

- Field trial with genetically engineered forest trees planned in Sweden
- Nobel Prize laureates unknowingly caught up in sales campaign for a biotech company?

## Current Issues and Activities

### **Testbiotech complaint against the EU authorisation for 'toxic soybeans'**

Testbiotech has requested that the EU Commission review its decision on the authorisation for import of genetically soybeans produced by Bayer and Monsanto. The soybeans can be sprayed with the herbicide glyphosate in combination with other herbicides, isoxaflutole and dicamba. At the end of July, the EU Commission gave the go ahead for the soybeans to be used in food and feed despite continuing concerns about health risks (<https://www.testbiotech.org/en/node/1699>). Analysis carried out by Testbiotech shows that the decision made by the EU Commission breaches GMO and pesticide regulations.

<https://www.testbiotech.org/en/node/1719>

### **Genetically engineered maize can give rise to superweeds**

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) is backing Monsanto, Dupont and Syngenta plans to extend the cultivation of genetically engineered maize in the EU. The companies are waiting for a decision that would allow them to sell seeds for three variants of genetically engineered maize in 2017. New environmental risks are emerging with the cultivation of the transgenic plants, in particular from teosinte. Teosinte is an alien plant originating in Central America, which has been spreading in Spain and France for several years. It can be found growing in fields alongside maize. Maize and teosinte together can produce viable offspring. The risk: By crossing with transgenic maize, teosinte can become a new superweed, producing insecticides and becoming resistant to herbicides. Driven by an urgent request from the EU Commission, EFSA has now published a hastily drawn up opinion downplaying these risks. <https://www.testbiotech.org/en/press-superweed-genetically-engineered-maize>

In October, the EU Parliament adopted several resolutions tabled across the parties, and called for the EU Commission not to authorise genetically engineered maize for cultivation. Some of the most important reasons mentioned in the resolution are the spread of teosinte in Spain and France, insufficient protection measures for protected species and the risks of emerging resistance in the pest insects.

<https://www.testbiotech.org/en/node/1736>

### **Conflicts of interest in EU risk research: EU Ombudsman calls for more transparency**

The European Ombudsman, Emily O'Reilly, has made a decision on a complaint filed by Testbiotech. The complaint was directed at the EU Commission and its management of conflicts of interest in publicly funded risk research projects. The EU Ombudsman decided that there was no clear evidence for maladministration at the EU Commission. However, she is backing some of the most relevant Testbiotech requests and saying that the EU Commission should consider a fuller and more thorough explanation of why it takes the view that the links between industry and scientists do not create conflicts of interest. Furthermore, in future, the names of experts involved in the evaluation of the specific research topics should be published along with their declarations of interests.

<https://www.testbiotech.org/en/node/1703>

### **New Testbiotech report on genetic engineering of animals and animal experiments**

In recent years, Europe has seen an increasingly strong trend towards experiments with genetically engineered animals. And the numbers continue to rise. In Germany, the number of genetically engineered animals used in experiments was around 1 million in 2013. Since 2004, the number of experiments has nearly tripled. The genetic engineering of animals is problematic from an ethical point of view because it involves animal suffering. Many of the genetically manipulated animals die due to severely adverse effects on health or are killed because they were not "successfully" genetically engineered.

<https://www.testbiotech.org/en/node/1706>

### **Testbiotech comment on maize Bt11 × 59122 × MIR604 × 1507 × GA21**

In September, Testbiotech published a commentary on EFSA's opinion on genetically-engineered maize Bt11 × 59122 × MIR604 × 1507 × GA21 and twenty subcombinations (from Syngenta). The plants produce five

Bt toxins (Cry1Ab, mCry3A, Cry34Ab, Cry35Ab, Cry1F) and are resistant to the herbicides glyphosate and glufosinate. The maize is also controversial within EFSA. In a minority vote, the EFSA expert Jean-Michel Wal points out gaps in the authority's risk assessment.

<https://www.testbiotech.org/node/1723>

### **Testbiotech comment on soybean 305423 x 40-3-2**

In September, Testbiotech published a comment on EFSA's opinion on the genetically engineered soybean 305423 x 40-3-2 produced by Pioneer/DuPont. The plants have a modified oleic acid composition and are resistant to ALS inhibitors and glyphosate.

<https://www.testbiotech.org/node/1726>

## **Scientific News**

### **Independent scientists set up international research project**

A new project dealing with the risks of genetically engineered plants was set up in November during a workshop in Zürich, Switzerland. The project is independent of the interests of the biotech industry. The experts from the public sector and civil society agree that current regulatory practise as applied in risk assessment of genetically engineered plants in Europe is not sufficient to safeguard the protection of health and the environment.

<https://www.testbiotech.org/en/node/1756>

### **EFSA caught up in massive conflicts of interest whilst at the same time dismissing scientific findings**

Testbiotech has raised serious allegations against the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), asserting that it is deeply entangled in conflicts of interest in its assessment of recent scientific findings. In July 2016, upon request of the EU Commission, EFSA claimed that a new scientific paper

(<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0278691516300722>) published by Norwegian scientists on the risks of genetically modified (GM) plants could not be used as a basis for drawing final conclusions, and would therefore not be relevant for risk assessment. At the same time, the Norwegian publication is one of the key documents in the court case at the EU Court of Justice (T177/13), in which both the EU Commission and EFSA are joint parties. Testbiotech is concerned that the EU Commission and the EFSA are following their own interests to bolster their position in the court case by dismissing the new study.

<https://www.testbiotech.org/en/node/1730>

## **News from EFSA**

### **EFSA opinion on cotton GHB119**

On 21 October, EFSA published an opinion on cotton GHB 119 from Bayer CropScience. The plants are resistant to the herbicide glufosinate and express the Bt toxin Cry2Ae. The GMO Panel concluded that GM cotton is as safe as conventional cotton. <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/efsajournal/pub/4586>

### **EFSA opinion on teosinte**

On 29 September, EFSA published an opinion on the occurrence of teosinte in Spain. The authority has failed to revise its previous risk assessment for genetically engineered maize despite the presence of this invasive weed.

<http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/supporting/pub/1094e>

### **EFSA opinion on maize Bt11 × 59122 × MIR604 × 1507 × GA21**

On 26 August, EFSA published an opinion on Syngenta's genetically engineered maize Bt11 × 59122 × MIR604 × 1507 × GA21 and twenty sub-combinations. The GMO Panel concluded that the maize and its

subcombinations are as safe as conventional maize.

<http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/efsajournal/pub/4567>

#### **EFSA opinion on soybean 305423 x 40-3-2**

On 18 August, EFSA published an opinion for genetically modified soybean 305423 × 40-3-2 with modified oleic acid composition and glyphosate resistance. The panel concluded that the soybeans are as safe for human and animal health and the environment as conventional soybeans.

<http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/efsajournal/pub/4566>

#### **EFSA opinion on a publication by Hofmann et al. (2016)**

On 27 July, EFSA issued an opinion on a publication by Hofmann et al. (2016) regarding the cultivation of genetically modified maize (MON810, Bt11 and 1507). Hofmann et al. had shown that pollen spreads over much greater distances than assumed by EFSA. However, the GMO Panel sees no reason to revise its risk assessment for the cultivation of transgenic maize.

<http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/supporting/pub/1070e>

#### **Stakeholder event on guidelines for the evaluation of allergenicity of genetically engineered plants**

On 23 November, EFSA held a stakeholder meeting to discuss the proposed revision of the EFSA Guidelines on the evaluation of allergenicity of genetically engineered plants. The Authority had already conducted a public consultation on this subject.

<http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/events/event/161123>

## **Other**

#### **Field trial with genetically engineered forest trees planned in Sweden**

In China, the US and Sweden, new methods of genetic engineering such as CRISPR are being used on forest trees. The first field trials are planned to take place in Sweden with genetically engineered poplars showing a range of genetic changes in their genome that affect flowering, growth, production of branches, leaves and roots. The goal of this type of engineering is to drastically change the phenotype and characteristics of the trees, without any specific purpose being provided. The poplars are genetically manipulated using various methods of genetic engineering, including the so-called CRISPR technique.

<https://www.testbiotech.org/en/node/1709>

#### **Nobel Prize laureates unknowingly caught up in sales campaign for a biotech company?**

In June, more than 100 Nobel Prize laureates signed an appeal in favour of the cultivation of so-called Golden Rice. Initiated by Sir Richard Roberts, who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1993, it targets and criticises anyone against the release of genetically engineered plants. For many years now, Roberts has been the chief scientific officer of New England Biolabs. Big corporates such as Monsanto, Syngenta and Dow AgroSciences are all clients of New England Biolabs.

<https://www.testbiotech.org/en/node/1753>