

Dr. Bernhard Url, Executive Director
European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)

cc EU Commission
cc EU Parliament

Open letter

18 March 2016

Dear Dr. Url

Conflicts of interest at the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)

Between 2009 and 2012, Testbiotech uncovered several cases of conflicts of interest at the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA). More recent further information on this issue has now come to light. We were alerted by the appointment of Barbara Gallani as EFSA communications director at the end of January 2016. Barbara Gallani will take up her post at EFSA in May 2016. She is currently serving as chief scientist at the UK food industry lobby group, the Food and Drink Federation, and will take up her position at EFSA without any cooling-off period.¹ According to Food Navigator, during her time at the Food and Drink Federation Gallani was responsible for industry positions on issues such as PCBs, dioxins and organic contaminants. Her appointment is strongly reminiscent of previous cases of “revolving doors” at EFSA: For example in 2009, Testbiotech discovered that Suzy Renckens, head of the GMO unit at EFSA, moved straight on to a GMO company without any cooling-off period. This case of mismanagement was criticised by both the EU Ombudsman² and the European Parliament³. Now it seems that the recent decision to appoint Ms Gallani has revived the revolving doors policy at EFSA; except that now the “revolving doors” are no longer hidden but firmly established as the main entrance to upper management levels.

When, in 2011 and 2012, EFSA started an initiative to raise its standards of independence, we considered this a step in the right direction. It meant, for example, that the rules for declaration of interest (DOI) were enforced. Further, any parallel activities of experts in institutions such as the ILSI (International Life Sciences Institute) were deemed unacceptable for experts serving on EFSA panels.⁴

Recently, however, Testbiotech investigation has shown that independence from industry still does not appear to play a major role in the selection of EFSA experts. Indeed, we did not even have to look very closely at some of the current members of the GMO panel to find conflicts of interest in three cases: Adinda De Schrijver, Jeremy Sweet and Jean-Michel Wal. In addition, a staff member of EFSA in the GMO unit, Yann Devos, is actively involved in several institutions that are known to have strong affiliations to industry.

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1 <http://www.foodnavigator.com/Policy/EFSA-comes-under-fire-for-latest-revolving-door-industry-recruitment>

2 <http://www.foodnavigator.com/Policy/Case-closed-EFSA-failed-on-conflict-of-interests-case-finds-EU-Ombudsman>

Apart from the GMO experts, we did a double check on the declaration of interest made by Alfonso Lampen. We know from our previous research that Lampen was involved with ILSI (Then, C. & Bauer-Panskus, A., 2012; Bauer-Panskus & Then, 2015c). We found, however, that his declaration of interest lacks any information about his work there.

We found three institutions with close links to industry that were the most relevant in this context (see Table 1 in the Annex): The International Life Sciences Institute (ILSI), the International Society for Biosafety Research (ISBR) and the International Organization for Biological Control West Palearctic Regional Section (IOBC/WPRS).

In the light of these findings we urge you to:

- Make sure that Ms Gallani has a cooling-off period of at least 18 months before taking up any position at EFSA
- Make sure that none of the staff members of the GMO unit or GMO panel are actively involved in institutions with strong affiliations to the GMO industry such as ISBR, ILSI, or IOBC / WPRS.
- Make sure that all members of your staff, expert panels and working groups fully declare relevant interests and are not actively involved in institutions with strong affiliations to industry such as ILSI.

Independence from industry and avoidance of conflicts of interest are of the highest relevance for safeguarding the credibility of EFSA and, therefore, we urge you to respond in the very near future. Please let us know if you require any further information.

With kind regards



Dr. Christoph Then,
Executive Director Testbiotech

Attachment: Annex to the open letter from Testbiotech to Bernhard Url about conflicts of interest at the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)

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