

EFSA gives carte blanche to the uncontrolled spread of Monsanto's genetically engineered oilseed rape

German government urged to take action to stop the flow of transgenes into the environment
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In a letter addressed to the German government, ten organisations are warning that genetically modified rapeseed could spread uncontrollably throughout the EU. The letter voices concern about a current European Food Safety Authority EFSA opinion, which argues in favour of an EU import approval for Monsanto's rapeseed MON88302. The glyphosate-resistant plant is to be imported in the form of viable seeds and, in Europe, will only be processed into feed. The plants have shown unexpected side effects due to a genetic modification that causes the plants to flower later than their natural counterparts. In its opinion, EFSA confirms that "the occurrence of feral GMHT [genetically modified herbicide-tolerant] oilseed rape plants are likely to occur wherever GMHT oilseed rape is transported." Even so, the authority sees no problems for agriculture and the environment.

"The Federal Government must vote against the import of the genetically modified oilseed rape and prevent its admission into the EU," says Peter Röhrig, Deputy Managing Director German Association of Organic Farmers, Food Processors and Traders (BÖLW). "Escape of transgenes from the fields is a growing problem worldwide. The EU must act now to protect the environment, but also farmers and consumers against the consequences of an uncontrolled spread of these plants."

Genetically modified oilseed rape is already spreading uncontrollably beyond the fields in different regions of the world (the United States, Canada, Australia and Japan). In the EU, there has so far been no large-scale cultivation of genetically modified oilseed rape. Nevertheless, there have been many instances of contamination with a transgenic rapeseed variety produced by Bayer. In Switzerland, numerous GM rapeseed plants were found along railway tracks that could be traced back to GM seed transports. Europe is seen as a centre of genetic diversity for the Brassicaceae family to which oilseed rape belongs, and contamination is especially problematic since it would allow the transgenes to spread into native plant populations.

"The German government must take action now within the framework of international agreements, and work towards legislation at a European and German national level. Effective regulation is urgently required to put effective regulation in place and to prevent burdening future generations with the uncontrolled spread of transgenic organisms", says Christoph Then of Testbiotech. "Should these plants at some point in the future harm the environment, there is no way to remove them from the environment."

Oilseed rape is not the only genetically engineered plant spreading uncontrollably. Therefore, an international call to act to prevent the uncontrolled spread of genetically engineered plants was launched recently and has already found many supporters. The letter to the German government also asks that its representatives push for clear prohibitions at the Conference of the Parties at the International Convention on Biological Diversity to be held in South Korea in autumn 2014.

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Further information: [Letter to German government](#) [3]

[International Call](#) [4]

[The opinion of EFSA](#) [5]

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[2] <mailto:info@testbiotech.org>

[3] <http://www.testbiotech.org/en/node/1066>

[4] <http://www.stop-the-spread-of-transgenes.org>

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