
Stop the uncontrolled spread of genetically engineered organisms: EU countries should take the lead

International Conference in South Korea - a starting point?
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On 29 of September an international Conference of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol will start in South Korea. Amongst others it will deal with the issue of unintended transboundary movements of genetically engineered organisms. A broad coalition of organisations are calling for initiatives to stop the uncontrolled spread of genetically engineered organisms into the environment. Testbiotech is demanding that the EU Member States take the lead in initiatives. For example, within its own territory, the EU should stop the import of viable genetically engineered oilseed rape kernels, because they can lead to the uncontrolled spread of such plants if lost during transport.

The Cartagena Protocol is part of the global framework of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and requires its Member States to take measures against unintended movements of genetically engineered organisms across its borders. These movements can be caused by human activities or occur spontaneously driven by the biological properties of the organisms. Within the last few years there have been several confirmed cases of the uncontrolled spread of genetically engineered organisms. Amongst those are maize and cotton in Mexico, bentgrass in the US and oilseed rape in Europe, Japan, Australia and North America. Furthermore, companies are planning to release genetically engineered flies that can easily move uncontrolled into the environment and over the borders of many countries.

While the EU delegation lists some problems and trade regulations in a position paper prepared for the conference, Testbiotech is demanding more targeted action: "The EU mentions some relevant problems such as genetically engineered insects moving uncontrolled into the environment, but no specific initiatives to prevent such releases have been presented. We ask the EU and its Member States to take significant steps towards creating international regulations now, to stop further releases of such organisms", says Christoph Then for Testbiotech. "We are concerned that the planned free trade agreement TTIP between US and EU might be a reason why the EU does not take a clear position."

An international call to stop the spread of genetically engineered organisms published in June 2014 was signed by 35 organisations. Some of them will be participating in the conference in Korea and organising a scientific conference on the issue.

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