

Last exit before the Frankenstein-Zoo?

Report on the risks of genetically engineered animals for human health and the environment

11 January 2016 / Now that market authorisation has been granted for genetically engineered salmon in the US, several companies are already aiming to introduce other genetically engineered animals into agriculture. A Testbiotech report, commissioned by the Green Group in the German Bundestag, will be published today and provides a comprehensive overview of planned applications, the risks for human health and the environment and the consequences for agriculture. According to the report, most of the planned applications such as increasing the amount of milk or changing its composition in dairy cattle, increasing the amount of meat in other livestock or the release of genetically engineered insects are highly questionable from a technical point of view. In fact, the release and usage of such animals in agriculture could trigger substantial risks for people and the environment. As the report further shows, risks such as spread into the environment or for human health at the stage of consumption cannot be reliably assessed.

This next generation of genetically engineered animals is being developed by using new methods of genetic engineering collectively known as gene-editing or synthetic gene-technologies. Based on these new technologies, some companies are already planning to produce animals with multiple changes in their genetic condition.

Economic interests and monetary gain are the major factors driving these developments. Patents are applied on livestock such as pigs and cattle. The UK corporation Genus, one of the largest animal breeding company in the world, is behind many of the applications currently being discussed. Amongst others, Genus supports the work of US company Recombinetics, which has already applied for more than a dozen patents on genetically engineered livestock. This company is working on producing hornless cattle as well as on cattle that can no longer reproduce, effectively preventing farmers from breeding their own cattle.

The US company Intrexon is also actively filing patents on pigs, cattle and sheep. It already has cloned cattle, genetically engineered insects and the genetically engineered salmon in its portfolio. Intrexon has even applied for patents on genetically engineered chimpanzees.

Testbiotech recommends several clear cut prohibitions:

- European politics should make clear that for the foreseeable future there will be no authorisation for genetically engineered animals or products derived thereof to be allowed on the market or released into the environment.
- National and international regulations must efficiently prevent any releases of genetically engineered organisms that cannot be controlled in space and time.
- Patents on farm animals should be prohibited in Europe.

The planned free trade agreements such as CETA and TTIP will become a challenge for European politicians to preserve the precautionary principle and the freedom of choice for consumer and farmers.

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Further information: [The study \(in German\)](#) [2]

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