

Conflicts of interest played down by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)

“EFSA is unaware of the facts, or seemingly trying to mislead public perception”
Wednesday, 15 June 2016

In an open letter to the EFSA Management Board, Testbiotech and GeneWatch UK are urging them to take measures to safeguard the independence of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) and restore its credibility. The reasons for this are recent cases of conflicts of interest:

Barbara Gallani moved from the UK food industry lobby group, the Food and Drink Federation, to EFSA as communications director without any cooling-off period. Four EFSA experts involved in the risk assessment of genetically engineered organisms and, at the same time, playing an active role in organisations with close affiliations to the biotech industry. A German expert, also working at the German Federal Institute for risk assessment (BfR), who was actively involved in the industry-funded International Life Sciences Institute (ILSI) and failed to mention this in his declaration of interest at EFSA.

The cases were brought to the attention of EFSA’s executive Director Bernhard Url in March. However, the response from Mr Url does not express much interest in sorting these problems out. For example, he believes the involvement of EFSA experts in the International Society for Biosafety Research (ISBR) is accidental and within the “normal range of activities performed by a scientist”. The work of ISBR is funded by Bayer, ILSI, CropLife, DuPont/Pioneer, Dow, Monsanto and Syngenta. One of the staff members of EFSA, involved in risk assessment of genetically engineered plants, is member of the Board of Directors at ISBR.

“The answer from Mr Url is not only insufficient and inconclusive, but also seems to be incorrect,” Christoph Then says for Testbiotech. “Mr Url appears to be unaware of the facts or - if he is aware - appears to be possibly trying to mislead public perception.”

“If our society can not trust in scientists and authorities which are supposed to protect health and the environment because they are not independent from those companies that want to make profit from risky technologies, we are facing a big problem”, Helen Wallace says for GeneWatch UK.

Already in 2011 and 2012, there were attempts to strengthen EFSA independence. This was because several individuals were actively involved with EFSA and ILSI at the same time. Further, there are some well-documented cases of revolving doors between EFSA and industry in the recent past. In 2015, in response to a complaint from GeneWatch UK, the Ombudsman concluded that EFSA had failed to ensure that those experts who work in academia declare all relevant information to EFSA, and recommended that EFSA should revise its conflict of interest rules. Nevertheless, no adequate action appears to have been taken in response to these cases.

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Further information: [The letter to the Management Board of EFSA with annex](#) [3]

[The answer from Mr Url to the letter from Testbiotech](#) [4]

[The letter from Testbiotech to Mr. Url, March 2016 with annex](#) [5]

[Decision of the EU Ombudsman regarding a complaint by GeneWatch UK](#) [6]

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