

Risk assessment of genetically engineered soybean turns out to be fake

Plants with triple herbicide resistance could soon be authorised for the first time
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Testbiotech has examined documents from applications submitted by Bayer and Dow AgroSciences for the approval of genetically engineered soybeans and found that important areas of risk assessment were not taken into account. In its field trials, Bayer only used about one kilo of glyphosate per hectare. In everyday agricultural practice, up to four or even eight kilograms per hectare are recommended. Moreover, plants produced by Dow AgroSciences were made resistant to more groups of herbicide substances than mentioned in the EFSA risk assessment. Any relevant data for the risks assessment are missing.

This new information is particularly controversial since EU authorisation is about to be issued for the import of soybeans genetically engineered to be resistant to three different classes of herbicides. This would be the first such authorisation for genetically engineered plants. The EU member states will make a decision on 14 September.

“This risk assessment of genetically engineered soybeans is fake,” summarises Christoph Then for Testbiotech. “Assessment of the genetically engineered plants has been organised so that the real risks are not assessed at all.”

Genetically engineered soybeans have been grown for many years in countries such as the USA, Brazil and Argentina. Over time, many of the weeds growing in these regions have adapted to herbicide use. This has in turn led to increasing amounts of herbicide being sprayed onto the crops and also an increase in the number of applications. In addition, the plants have been manipulated to be resistant to other herbicides. The new genetically engineered soybeans have been made resistant to several hazardous herbicides, including glyphosate that is thought to be probably carcinogenic; glufosinate which, according to an EFSA evaluation, is classified as showing reproductive toxicity; and isoxaflutole, which “bleaches” weeds and is already classified as a “suspected human carcinogen”. In the case of 2,4-D, recent publications suggest that carcinogenic metabolites are produced in genetically modified plants

If the herbicides used on the plants are not tested under realistic conditions, there will be no reliable data on the actual amount of residue in the harvest. This means that that risks to health cannot be reliably evaluated. Additionally, depending on the amount of herbicide that is sprayed onto the plants, the plant constituents could be changed so that e.g. allergies could become more severe or phytoestrogens have an increased effect.

Despite all the risks, the new genetically engineered soybeans have not been tested in animal feeding trials to assess adverse effects on health.

Now that the European Food Safety Authority has given the go-ahead, the EU member states will vote on 14 September for the second time on the approval. If the application is not rejected, then the EU commission can allow the import of the soybeans. Testbiotech is demanding that the German government and the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture headed by Christian Schmidt, reject the approval.

The Testbiotech investigation is still ongoing because EFSA and Bayer are delaying access to relevant documents. Testbiotech will report further details as soon as possible.

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Further information: [Fact check: Genetically engineered soybeans with triple herbicide resistance](#) [2]

[Film about the risks of genetically engineered soybeans from Bayer \(in German\)](#) [3]

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