

Drought-tolerant GE maize: Rejected in South Africa but approved in the EU?

GE maize combining insecticidal toxins, herbicide resistance and supposedly drought-tolerant might be approved for import into the EU

5 October 2019 / The European Food Safety Authority EFSA has given the green light for the import of Bayer (Monsanto) GE maize which produces several insecticides; it has multiple resistance to glyphosate and is said to be drought-tolerant. However, experience with the cultivation of the GE crop plants is disappointing: they do not show any advantages in comparison to conventionally bred maize when grown in drought conditions.

Currently, several regions are growing more and more drought-tolerant maize, most of which is derived from conventional breeding. Just this week, South Africa rejected the application of Bayer for the approval of another variation of the GE maize for cultivation because it did not show any advantages. The reason: The drought tolerance gene “did not provide yield protection in water-limited conditions.”

The decision on the EU import has not yet been taken. EU governments will vote on it before the EU Commission can take any decision. According to Testbiotech, approval cannot be given because the risks to health and the environment have not been sufficiently investigated.

“This maize has a new combination of traits that has not been tested under the environmental conditions of more extreme drought and heat expected in commercial cultivation. It has also not been shown that food and feed derived from the maize under such conditions is safe for consumption,” says Christoph Then for Testbiotech.

Despite climate change and food security often being cited as reasons for the introduction of GE plants into agriculture, so far, any evidence of advantages is mostly lacking. According to Testbiotech, these experiences also are relevant for future applications of new methods of genetic engineering. In many cases, detailed data are only presented as part of the approval process. Without obligatory risk assessment, there cannot be sufficient transparency. Claims regarding the benefits cannot be examined, neither can safety in regard to health and the environment. Therefore, Testbiotech is very concerned about the attempts of industry to dismantle EU regulation: their lobbyists are pushing for deregulation, and that, in future, not all genetically engineered organisms need to undergo obligatory risk assessment.

Contact:

Christoph Then, info@testbiotech.org [1], Tel + 49 15154638040

Further information: [Testbiotech comment regarding maize MON87427 x MON87460 x MON89034 x MIR162 x NK603](#) [2]
[South Africa's rejection of application for cultivation](#) [3]

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