

Will Bayer GE soybeans be allowed for use in food production without safety being demonstrated?

EU Parliament votes against import of soybeans with triple resistance to herbicides

14 May 2020 / Yesterday the EU Parliament voted with a huge majority against the import of genetically engineered (GE) soybeans (MON 87708 x MON 89788 x A5547-127) resistant to three herbicides produced by Bayer. The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) considered the soybeans which inherit several transgenes, to be safe for human consumption. However, according to the EU Parliament, the risk assessment was not sufficient. One reason: the soybeans have not been tested for combinatorial effects arising from the genetic interventions and the residues from spraying with herbicides glyphosate, dicamba and glufosinate.

The EU Parliament resolution states: "(...) the combinatorial toxicity of the complementary herbicides and metabolites as well as their potential interaction with the GM plant itself, in this case GM soybean MON 87708 x MON 89788 x A5547-127, have not been taken into account." For example, feeding studies were only performed for a period of 90 days and only with plants that inherited a single herbicide resistance. However, no feeding studies were performed with the GE soybeans inheriting the triple resistance as foreseen for import.

The concerns about current standards of risk assessment recently carried out by EFSA were confirmed in the outcome of the RAGES international research project. The project was carried out independently of biotech-industry. The RAGES experts conclude that current standards of risk assessment are not sufficient to fulfill the legal requirements to determine that the safety of genetically engineered plants and food and feed derived thereof is "adequately and sufficiently demonstrated" by applying "highest possible standard" to "any risks which they present". Consequently, if the genetic engineering of the plants involves the insertion of several transgenes, the resulting effects also have to be assessed in combination.

The vote in EU Parliament was taken against the backdrop of ongoing consultations between the EU Commission and the US government, which include a potential speeding up of the approval processes for GE plants. Testbiotech warns that this would be irresponsible and threaten the legally binding high level of protection in the EU for human health and the environment.

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