

Ten approvals for the import of genetically engineered crops rushed through

EU Commission takes controversial decision during the summer break

22 August 2021 / The EU Commission has rushed through ten approvals for the import of genetically engineered (GE) plants. The approvals were issued for maize, soybeans, oilseed rape and cotton, which produce insecticidal toxins and/or are engineered to be resistant to herbicides such as glyphosate; the approvals include seven new variants of GE plants and three renewals. The applications were filed by Monsanto (Bayer), Dow AgroSciences (Corteva) and Syngenta (ChemChina).

The harvest of these plants is now allowed for import and usage in food and feed. The EU Parliament has in recent years passed dozens of resolutions demanding that these imports should not be not allowed.

The huge majority of genetically engineered crops allowed for import into the EU produce several insecticides in combination with resistance to herbicides, such as glyphosate. So far, the EU has systematically avoided assessing combinatorial effects between the various toxins and other constituents in these plants. Amongst others, there are concerns that consumption of these products might enhance or trigger chronic inflammatory processes.

Apart from the US, the most important exporting countries are Brazil and Argentina. Further relevant countries include Canada and Paraguay. However, the EU, typically does not request any data for GE plants tested in the growing conditions prevalent in South America. In nearly all cases, field trials are only performed in the US. However, the bioclimatic conditions and the agricultural practices are vastly different in these other regions, and this can also impact the safety of the food and feed derived thereof.

At the beginning of 2021, Testbiotech published a detailed report on the deficiencies in risk assessment. It concluded that the gaps in the approval process had harmful consequences for EU food production due to an accumulation of non-clarified risks. In fact, the safety of EU food and feed production has been decreasing ever since the GE plants were introduced, although nobody has officially spoken out about this problem in public. In addition, environmental damage is being caused in the producing countries – but this is mostly denied.

These problems are likely to increase within the next few years because the EU Commission is signalling plans to deregulate EU standards to align with Canada and the US. This will focus on plants generated by New GE methods, using tools such as CRISPR/Cas gene scissors. In contradiction to the facts, the EU Commissions claims that New GE will not give rise to new risks.

Testbiotech set up a database about ten years ago and has since then provided information on EU approvals of GE plants and detailed assessments of GE crops allowed for import. In addition, it provides an overview of the number and categories of EU authorisations. The new approvals are for:

Three maize events:

MON 87427 x MON 87460 x MON 89304 x 1507 x MON 87411 x 59122,
1507 x MON 810 x MIR162 x NK603,
MZIR098;

Two soybean events:

DAS-81419-2,
DAS-81419-2 x DAS-44406-6;

oilseed rape (Ms8xRf3xGT73) and cotton (GHB119 x GHB614 x T304-40).

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