
Prospective technology assessment essential for New GE in agriculture

EU Commission heavily criticised for one-sided approach

19 July 2022 / Testbiotech is demanding that applications of New GE (new genomic techniques, NGTs) in agriculture should undergo a comprehensive prospective technology assessment. The demand is being made against the backdrop of a public consultation organised by the EU Commission on the future regulation of genetically engineered plants. Testbiotech is warning that the Commission is aiming to lower standards in the approval processes to an extent which is equivalent to deregulation. In addition, it is planning targeted measures to promote the introduction of New GE in agricultural plant breeding. In starting this new initiative, the Commission is mostly ignoring the potentially negative impacts.

A more balanced approach would require a comprehensive technology assessment. This would not only include the risks and potential benefits of specific genetically engineered plants, but also the systemic impact that the introduction of the new technology would have on health, the environment and food production processes. For example, there needs to be an investigation into whether the parallel release of many different New GE organisms could trigger a whole new dimension of problems for the environment. However, there is currently no regulatory framework for this kind of prospective technology assessment. Instead, the Commission is simply asserting that the claims in regard to the sustainability of New GE plants are an actual fact.

Prospective technology assessment would need to systematically assess the impact of NGT on agriculture and breeding, and also take a close look at patents on seeds which are deeply concerning: more and more patents are not only claiming the technical processes to generate food plants but also their genetic diversity. This can block or hamper access to biodiversity needed by all breeders, and thus become a major threat to future world food security.

It appears that the Commission is taking an extreme position on this matter, claiming that there is no difference between the risks associated with New GE in comparison to conventional breeding. Moreover, questions relating to seed patents are explicitly excluded from the consultation. Testbiotech is therefore warning against what appears to be the Commission's loss of reality, which may endanger the means of livelihood.

It is becoming apparent that the EU Commission is planning to green wash New GE: food derived thereof could be labelled as especially sustainable, and the introduction of New GE into breeding and agriculture may be supported by targeted measures. Testbiotech is, therefore, also warning that without prospective technology assessment, another impending man-made disaster may have serious implications for future generations. Similarly to other technologies which put nature and the environment at risk, releases of New GE organisms should be reduced to what is absolutely necessary or, if possible, be avoided altogether.

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Further information: [The consultation](#) [2]

[Testbiotech input to the consultation](#) [3]

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