

Head of department moves from European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) to biotech company within two months

Authorities react only after Testbiotech disclosures
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The former head of the GMO-panel at the European Food Safety Authority EFSA, Suzy Renckens, has moved directly into the genetic engineering industry without any objections or restrictions being imposed by the authority. This was revealed in documents sent by the EFSA upon request to the group of experts at Testbiotech, Germany.

The move to the company Syngenta, took place in May 2008 although Mrs Renckens only terminated her employment contract with the EFSA at the end of March. After Testbiotech made this information public, the EFSA executive management responded in December 2009. According to EU staff regulations former members of EU public services have to ask for approval from their institutions for new positions. This has to be done within a period of two years after leaving the institution. In Mrs Renckens' case the authority had neither raised any objections whatsoever nor had it imposed any conditions.

Christoph Then, executive director of Testbiotech e.V., said, "The executive management of the authority has been negligent in its duty of care. Mrs Renckens' direct move into industry should not have been approved. The EFSA executive management apparently lacks sufficient awareness of the problem. The procedure is portrayed by the authority as completely normal."

Testbiotech reported on this problem for the first time on 10 November 2009 and sent an official letter of enquiry to the EFSA. A reply arrived on 11 January 2009, clearly exceeding the permissible period of time for a reply. Together with its reply, the EFSA sent a number of different emails which had been exchanged between Mrs Renckens and the authority. According to these Mrs Renckens worked for the EFSA from April 2003 until 31 March 2008, and on 19 May 2008 told her former work colleagues in an email that she now had an executive position at Syngenta.

In her own words she said that in future she would also be approaching the authority personally in regard to marketing approval for genetically engineered plants. In her previous position at the EFSA she had been in charge of precisely this group of experts dealing with such applications.

"With such proximity to industry, the question is just how independently can the authority act in making decisions on the licensing of genetically engineered organisms," said Christoph Then. "The EU commission should make its stance clear on this issue."

It was not until December 2009, after Testbiotech had made its report and journalists began questioning the authority, that the executive management of the EFSA contacted Mrs Renckens and pointed out that her work was subject to approval for up to two years after her resignation. Mrs Renckens replied that the EFSA already knew about her work. In her new capacity she had, amongst other things, taken part in a meeting between the authority and the EU Commission in March 2009.

Testbiotech demands that the EFSA has to face consequences and should be reorganised. Testbiotech will also be contacting the EU Commission on the matter.

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Further information: [First press release about Suzy Renckens](#) [3]

Attachment

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