

EU Commission to dump risk assessment of genetically engineered plants?

Testbiotech warns that EU legislation will be eroded
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Brussels

The EU Commission is planning to adopt large parts of the European Food Authority's (EFSA) guidelines on the risk assessment of genetically engineered plants as an official part of EU regulations. The EFSA guidelines are controversial and widely disputed in public. They have been heavily criticized from many sides. Nevertheless, in future large parts of these guidelines might become the official interpretation of EU legislation in this context. EU regulations (e.g. regulation 1829/2003 and 178/2002) provide a high level of protection for consumers and the environment because they are based on the precautionary principle. This is in contrast to the EFSA guidelines, which are very much oriented to the interests of industry and perceived as not fulfilling these high standards. In recent years, concerns have been raised by many organisations active in consumer and environmental protection as well as by many Member States of the European Union.

"The planned EU regulation reads to a large extent as copy and paste of the EFSA's guidelines. If the regulation is adopted both industry and the EFSA will claim this as a breakthrough. The EFSA guidelines, parts of which are already flawed, will become the officially adopted binding EU standard. The risks of genetically engineered plants will not be assessed thoroughly," warns Christoph Then, executive director of Testbiotech.

The EFSA guidelines are controversial because only some requirements for risk assessment are presumed as being mandatory. For example, health risks are only very superficially assessed in comparison to the standards set for pesticides and pharmaceuticals. There are no requirements for long-term testing. These are the standards now being transferred to the planned Commission regulation.

Testbiotech is also criticizing that the EU Commission is taking this initiative whilst the EFSA is scheduled to publish new guidelines for environmental risk assessment by March 2010. The Commission's proposal is likely to interfere with this process leading to further uncertainties and even contradictions in the system of EU regulations. The draft document of the Commission (1) has already been posted to the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The Commission regulation is due to be signed in May 2010 and come into force in June 2010.

(1) Draft Commission Regulation on implementing rules concerning applications for authorisation of genetically modified food and feed in accordance with Regulation (EC) No 1829/2003 of the European Parliament and of the Council and amending Regulations No (EC) 641/2004 and (EC) No 1981/2006 (66 pages, in English).

http://members.wto.org/cnattachments/2010/tbt/eec/10_0030_00_e.pdf [1]

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Attachment



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