

EFSA's revolving door to biotech industry unacceptable

NGOs file complaints to EU Ombudsman and Commission
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Munich / Strassbourg

The Germany-based NGO Testbiotech has today filed an official complaint with the European Ombudsman against EFSA, the EU's food safety agency. The complaint targets EFSA's decision to allow Suzy Renckens, head of EFSA's GMO Unit, to become a lobbyist for biotech giant Syngenta, without any 'cooling off' period or other restrictions. Ms Renckens move to become a leading lobbyist for one of the major biotech companies in Europe implies an obvious conflict of interest.

"It is unacceptable that EFSA failed to act to prevent conflicts of interest in the case of Ms Renckens' move to Syngenta, considering the agency's powers over food safety decisions in Europe", says Christoph Then of Testbiotech. "As the two-year period within which officials need permission has still not passed, EFSA should immediately impose a ban on Ms Renckens lobbying to influence EFSA." Testbiotech and Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO) have today also written to Commission's president Barroso insisting that the Commission must intervene to make EFSA tighten its conflicts of interest checks. The NGOs had written to the Commission before to raise concerns about the Renckens case after it emerged that no "cooling off" period had been enforced. The Commission's consumer affairs department (DG SANCO) replied it is not responsible for EFSA, which is an independent EU agency.

"The Commission is denying all responsibility for the activities of the European Food Safety Agency", says Nina Holland of Corporate Europe Observatory. "The Renckens case however reveals a bigger problem of undue industry influence at EFSA, feeding to existing doubts concerning EU food safety decisions."

According to the informations available, Ms Renckens informed EFSA of her new appointment by Syngenta in 2008. Although EFSA then had the right to take appropriate action, the authority accepted Dr Renckens' move and did not impose any obligations. Only in November 2009, after Testbiotech had criticised the case, EFSA contacted Ms Renckens and reminded her of her obligations in relation to confidentiality.

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 Testbiotech complaint EU Ombudsman_fin.pdf	269.15 KB
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Source URL: <https://www.testbiotech.org/en/press-release/efsas-revolving-door-biotech-industry-unacceptable>

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