

European Food Safety Authority admits failure

EFSA did not stop revolving doors
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For the first time, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) admits that it did not take the necessary action to stop revolving doors. EFSA states that “regrettably” the authority did not follow up the relevant information. Further, the authority acknowledges that it has strengthened internal rules in response.

The statements were made in regard to the case of Suzy Renckens. She was head of EFSA’s GMO Unit from 2003 to 2008. The GMO unit is responsible for the risk assessment of genetically engineered plants. In 2008, Suzy Renckens moved directly to a lobbying position in Brussels for the biotechnology corporation Syngenta, which produces and markets genetically engineered plants. In 2009, Testbiotech brought the case to public attention but EFSA and the EU Commission refused to take any action. Therefore, Testbiotech, with the support of Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO), asked the EU Ombudsman to investigate the case. In a letter sent to the Ombudsman, EFSA has admitted its failure for the first time.

“EFSA should have admitted its problems much earlier. This lengthy process further damages the credibility of EFSA. And after all, it is still not clear if EFSA will stop such a move to industry in the future,” says Christoph Then for Testbiotech. “We also see a need for further action by EFSA to show that they are serious about banning conflicts of interests.” In this context, Testbiotech has asked the EU Ombudsman for his support in another case, which concerns Harry Kuiper. He was the chair of the so-called GMO panel at EFSA for nearly ten years and has strong ties with the International Life Sciences Institute (ILSI), which is funded by agrochemicals and the food industry.

Corporate Europe Observatory has demanded that the EU Commission takes much stronger action to protect the independence of the EU authority. The fact that the Commission recently proposed a former staff member of the US Bioetch giant Monsanto and top EU food industry lobbyist, Mella Frewen, to become member of the Management Board of EFSA, is very worrying. “The EU Commission is not doing ESFA any favours by nominating a food lobbyist as candidate for the agency’s management board. If EFSA is to regain its independence in the future, people with ties to industry should be excluded from the panels as well as from the management board,” says Nina Holland from CEO.

The European Parliament is also concerned about the independence of EFSA. In a recent vote in the EP budget committee, a majority voted in favour of postponing the approval of the budget of the Authority, until further steps are taken to ban conflicts of interest.

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Further information: [Links to the answer from EFSA](#) [5]

[All further documents concerning the case of Suzy Renckens](#) [6]

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