
Genetic engineering: Risk assessment on the leash of industry

EU project GRACE holds conference in Berlin
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Today, the participants of the international research project GRACE (GMO Risk Assessment and Communication of Evidence) meet in Berlin. Future guidelines for the risk assessment of genetically engineered plants are the centre of this project, and its outcomes could have far-reaching consequences for approval procedure and risk research in the EU. A Testbiotech report published today shows significant conflicts of interest between leading GRACE experts and the biotech industry. Testbiotech is calling for the project to be stopped and an independent review carried out.

„GRACE lacks the necessary independence and transparency. The EU Commission has awarded it millions of Euros from research funds without ever checking the participating experts for conflicts of interest. There is a risk that the findings on genetically engineered plants could be misinterpreted and health and environmental hazards discovered too late“ says Christoph Then for Testbiotech.

Many of the GRACE experts are associated with organisations and networks, which are at least partly funded by the biotech industry. For example, the report criticises the project coordinator Joachim Schiemann, who is director of the biotechnology department at the Julius Kühn-Institut, a federal research institution of the German Ministry of Agriculture. According to the report, Schiemann is at the centre of a network of industry agencies and international organisations with strong ties to the biotech industry who systematically influence research and federal agencies.

The costs of the project, whose main aim is risk research on genetically engineered plants, amount to more than 7.7 million Euros. Nearly six million Euros are from EU funds. The Testbiotech report shows a distinct circle of people with ties to the biotech industry, that has profited from EU funds for risk-related research for many years and have a considerable amount of influence on the standards for the assessment of genetically engineered crops. Testbiotech believes that public funding for risk-related research must only be granted if it is free from corporate influence.

Contact:

Christoph Then, Tel: +4915154638040, info@testbiotech.org [1]

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