

## EFSA GMO-Panel: Still biased

Munich/Parma, 25 June 2012. The revised GMO expert panel at the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) still has a majority of experts in favour of using genetically engineered plants in agriculture. Testbiotech estimates that eleven of the twenty panel members have links to industry or are known as proponents of the controversial technology.

Amongst its members are some well-known experts like Gijs Kleter who worked with the International Life Science Institute (ILSI) for many years. ILSI is funded by industry and has influenced EFSA standards for the risk assessment of genetically engineered plants. Huw Jones is involved in the development of genetically engineered wheat, and has cooperated with companies such as Bayer and Dow AgroSciences. The interests of the experts are not always made evident: Patrick Du Jardin, for instance, is associated with the Public Research and Regulation Initiative (PRRI), which is lobbying to lower standards of risk assessment and labelling, something that was not mentioned in his Declaration of Interest (DoI) at EFSA. The German members of the panel are Achim Gathmann and Christoph Tebbe, who are known for downplaying the risks of genetically engineered plants.

“We still cannot trust the GMO panel. It seems that the authority still has a long way to go in establishing its independence from the interests of industry. We are not currently expecting a change of policy in their approach to risk assessment and authorisation of genetically engineered plants,” says Christoph Then for Testbiotech.

After coming under pressure from the public, EFSA recently adopted stricter rules for securing its independence. The chair of the EFSA Management Board, who was closely affiliated with ILSI, had to leave. However, there are still some experts with close links to ILSI in several of the expert panels. In addition to Gijs Kleter, these include German experts such as Roland Franz, Karl Heinz Engel and Alfonso Lampen, who are all also closely involved in the work of the German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR). None of these experts declared this affiliation with ILSI in their DoIs.

From the perspective of Testbiotech, there are some positive developments: Mella Frewen, who is one of the leading EU food industry lobbyists, was not selected by the EU member states to become a member of the EFSA Management Board. The EU Commission proposal was rejected in the Council on 18 June.

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