

Genetically engineered soybeans: Testbiotech accuses companies of manipulating risk assessment

EFSA provides data but only after a substantial delay

21 December 2017 / According to a Testbiotech analysis, there are clear indications that the companies Dow and Bayer manipulated the data for risk assessment of their genetically engineered soybeans. The claim is based on analysis of the data presented by the companies for risk assessment in the EU. Analysis showed that Dow used a special sample of the genetically engineered soybeans in their feeding studies with rats, which was sprayed with much lower amount of herbicides than usual. In their field trials, Bayer only applied a fraction of the amounts of the herbicides that would normally be used in agricultural practice. The European Food Safety Authority EFSA only just this week and after a long delay made relevant documents on risk assessment available. Testbiotech is demanding that EU approval is stopped.

The genetically engineered soybean plants produced by Bayer and Dow AgroSciences each have triple resistance to three different herbicides, including glyphosate. In their feeding studies, Dow used specially grown genetically engineered soybeans that were only treated with two of the three relevant herbicides. Furthermore, the total amount of herbicides sprayed onto the soybeans was less than half of the amount that is sprayed in other field trials carried out by Dow. As far as Bayer is concerned, it is evident that they only applied around a third of the amounts of the herbicides that would normally be applied in practical agricultural conditions. The company did not perform any feeding trial to assess the health risks.

“Analysis of the documents produced by the companies for the risk assessment of their soybeans shows a pattern of targeted manipulation. The most probable reason for this is that the companies intended to conceal the real risks to health from consumption of these soybeans. Their aim is to have the soybeans declared safe so that they can be marketed profitably,” says Christoph Then for Testbiotech. “EFSA should never have accepted these data.”

According to the EU Commission, the health risks associated with genetically engineered soybeans can be assessed separately and independently of any herbicides they are resistant to. Testbiotech has rejected this approach on the grounds that it is inadequate and misleading. In accordance with the guidelines for EU risk assessment, the plants have to be sprayed with the herbicides they are resistant to. But if the herbicides are not tested on the plants in realistic conditions, the risk assessment is flawed.

If the plants are sprayed with less herbicide in the field trials than would be usual in normal farming practice, this will not only influence the amount of herbicide residues in the plants from spraying. It can also influence changes in plant composition, which is dependent on the dosage of herbicides

sprayed onto the plants. These changes can cause health risks by, for instance, increasing the effects of allergens or phytoestrogens. These risks were neither assessed under pesticide regulation, nor under GMO regulation. Nevertheless, in a letter to Testbiotech, the EU Commission has already announced that they want to authorise the soybeans.

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Further information:

Most recent version of the background on the risks of genetically engineered soybeans:
www.testbiotech.org/node/2066

Video clip explaining the general problem with risk assessment of the soybeans:
<https://www.testbiotech.org/en/limits-to-biotech/toxic-soy>