

Media release



Spread of genetically engineered organisms out of control

New report on recent and emerging cases

21 September 2015 / Testbiotech will today publish a report providing a global overview of recent cases of uncontrolled spread of genetically engineered organisms able to persist and propagate in the environment. The report will be presented to a working group organised by the Secretary of the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD) at a meeting taking place in Montreal (Canada) from 21 - 25 September.

The evidence presented in this report comes from China (rice), Mexico (maize and cotton), Japan (oilseed rape) South Korea (maize and cotton), Switzerland (oilseed rape) and the USA (grasses). Further emerging examples are likely to include eggplant (India / Bangladesh), trees such as pine and eucalyptus in North and South America and genetically engineered insects (Brazil and Panama).

The increasingly serious risks associated with new methods currently being used in synthetic gene technologies to produce organisms that, for example, can act as gene drives are further exacerbating the situation. The pattern of heredity is manipulated in these organisms to enable the new synthetic DNA to spread much more rapidly than normal into native populations.

“We are at a crossroads. The uncontrolled spread and propagation of genetically engineered organisms in the environment is adding an extra level of risk to biodiversity and the future of our planet”, Christoph Then says for Testbiotech. “All future generations will have to deal with new risks and long-term impacts created by current short-term economic interests and flaws in international and national regulation.”

It is impossible to predict the long-term ecological impact of transgenes that escape spatio-temporal control. Long-term, evolutionary processes make it possible for events with a low probability of ever happening to turn into events that may feasibly happen. Consequently, performing reliable risk assessment is not possible in these cases. In result, these releases should be generally prohibited.

Testbiotech is one of the initiators of an international call demanding that the contracting parties of the CBD take action to establish an internationally binding framework, which will prohibit the release of genetically engineered organisms if they are able to spread and propagate in the environment.

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The report: www.testbiotech.org/node/1339

The international call: www.stop-the-spread-of-transgenes.org/