

Playing Russian roulette with biodiversity

Testbiotech warns about uncontrolled introduction of gene-edited organisms

25 September 2017 / Testbiotech is today publishing a new report on the risks of new methods of genetic engineering (gene editing), which make use of tools such as the DNA scissor CRISPR-Cas. Testbiotech reports that the risks are far from being sufficiently recognised and understood. However, many stakeholders are presenting the technology as being so safe that relevant organisms can be released and marketed without needing to undergo risk assessment or comply with labelling requirements. Testbiotech strongly warns about the uncontrolled introduction of gene-edited organisms.

„Uncontrolled applications of gene-editing threaten biodiversity, the rights of consumers and farmers, as well as the future of animal and plant breeding”, warns Christoph Then, who is one of the authors of the report. “Once this game of Russian roulette has started there will be no reliable way of protecting of health and environment.”

The use of gene editing tools, such as the “gene-scissors” CRISPR, allow new ways of genome manipulation. They make it possible to edit the genome by removing or changing natural genes, as well as introducing artificial DNA. Gene editing has a huge range of potential applications in agriculture and the environment not only for crop plants and livestock, but also for natural biodiversity, such as insects, wild animals, trees and grasses. In effect, the biotech companies are planning to intervene in the “germline” of biodiversity.

If organisms derived from new methods of genetic engineering are exempted from regulation, there will be no mandatory risk assessment and no labelling. Any possible future decisions and freedom of choice for future generations would be thrown overboard together with the precautionary principle. It would also be impossible to protect agriculture that does not use genetic engineering technology. Farmers and consumers would lose freedom of choice and decision-making. Technical faults, unintended side effects, risks and biological hazards associated with these developments can rapidly become unmanageable and uncontrollable burdens for following generations.

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Further information:

The Testbiotech report: www.testbiotech.org/en/node/2078