

Media release



'Independent scientists' serving the interests of industry

Untruthful assertions about new methods of genetic engineering

2 May 2018 / At present, biotech lobbyists are very active in the EU - and if they achieve their aims these could severely impact the environment and consumers. The lobbyists are attempting to persuade politicians and law-makers that the new methods of genetic engineering, based on methods such as the CRISPR/Cas technique, should be exempted from EU GMO regulation. They claim that changes introduced by techniques known as genome editing are not distinguishable from those brought about by conventional breeding. This is not true. Nevertheless, it is something that is repeated over and over again. Even the president of the umbrella organisation of German biologists (VBIO), Bernd Müller-Röber, is currently lobbying members of the EU Parliament with this false assertion.

In particular, the VBIO is meant to be politically, ideologically and economically independent. This is, however, evidently not the case for the president of VBIO – for years he has filed patents on genetic engineering technology, most recently on new methods of genetic engineering. Therefore, he somehow appears to be also his own best lobbyist.

Many of these experts are concealing the facts: in most cases, the methods and results of changes introduced by techniques using CRISPR/Cas are substantially different from those used in current plant and animal breeding, even if no additional genes are inserted. To explain some relevant differences, Testbiotech now has published a first tabled overview.

Testbiotech is strongly in favour of regulating the new methods of genetic engineering according to GMO regulation. If this new technology is not regulated, the EU will be in a similar situation to that currently in the USA, where many genetically engineered organisms, such as 'CRISPR-mushrooms', have been approved without being extensively risk assessed. This means that there is no reliable information on risks and no way of controlling their spread into the environment. Basically, the authorities, political bodies, farmers and consumers will have neither control nor choice in these matters.

In addition, the US company Monsanto is now leaning more strongly towards the new methods of genetic engineering. Recently, it announced that it would be investing 100 million US dollars in a start-up called Pairwise to develop applications for use in agriculture.

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Further informations:

Tabled overview of the differences between CRISPR and random mutation breeding:
www.testbiotech.org/en/node/2198

The CRISPR mushroom: www.testbiotech.org/en/limits-to-biotech/mushroom/basic_paper

Announcement that plants developed with CRISPR to be exempted from regulation in the USA
<https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDAAPHIS/bulletins/1e591cd>

Announcement: Monsanto to invest in Pairwise
<https://monsanto.com/news-releases/monsanto-and-pairwise-announce-rd-collaboration-to-accelerate-innovation-in-agriculture-with-gene-editing/>

The position of VBIO:
www.vbio.de/fileadmin/user_upload/verband/Positionen/160914_GE_Impuls.pdf

Examples of patent applications filed involving Bernd Müller-Röber as inventor:

EP584324 B1 (granted 2003), Company Bayer

EP571427 B1 (granted 2003), Company Bayer

WO2018046496 (filed 2017), University of Potsdam