



Reboot EFSA to safeguard independence

European Food Safety Authority under fire because of strong ties with industry

Brussels, 11 October 2011 - Civil society groups will raise concerns about the independence of the European Food Safety Authority at a key stakeholder meeting on Wednesday 12 October, following a series of allegations concerning conflicts of interest and close ties to industry.

The stakeholder workshop has been organised by EFSA as part of its efforts to re-establish its credibility with representatives from the EU Commission, EU presidency, member states, other European agencies and civil society groups around the table. EFSA's impartiality has been under question for several years, with a number of the agency's experts and even members of its Management Board revealed to have strong ties with either the food, biotech or chemical industry, or to institutions working for industry. Numerous NGOs, scientists and MEPs have questioned the agency's ability to give independent advice, voicing concerns that numerous examples of conflicts of interest compromise its objectivity.

An issue of major concern is systematic infiltration of the agency by individuals that are also active for the International Life Sciences Institute (ILSI), which is sponsored by companies such as Coca-Cola, Monsanto, Dow Chemical and Nestle. Nina Holland of Corporate Europe Observatory in Brussels said: "Within EFSA we already know of more than a dozen experts dealing with risk assessment of genetically engineered plants, pesticides and food additives who are also working with ILSI. But EFSA has taken no action to protect its panels against these serious conflicts of interest."

Conflicts of interest penetrate to the highest levels of organisation within EFSA, with even some members of the agency's management board linked to industry and ILSI. The civil society groups are now demanding to give much more weight to stakeholders representing consumer interests, protection of the environment and animal welfare. Christoph Then from Testbiotech in Germany said: "Much more needs to be done to protect EFSA's independence. Industry representatives should be barred from the management board and representatives from civil society groups who do not have vested economic interests, should be given much more say. We need a clean up of EFSA's panels. Experts working for ILSI should not be members of EFSA's panels."

But critics say the workshop is unlikely to make any short term changes. A draft paper published ahead of the workshop failed to address current problems with conflicts of interest or the huge deficiencies concerning independent risk research.

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relevant reports published recently

Corporate Europe Observatory, 2011: Serial conflicts of interest on EFSA's management board. http://www.corporateeurope.org/sites/default/files/2011-02-23_MB_REPORT_1.pdf

Corporate Europe Observatory, 2011: Exposed: conflicts of interest among EFSA's experts on food additives. www.corporateeurope.org/sites/default/files/publications/EFSA_ANS_panel.pdf

Earth Open Source, 2011: Europe's Pesticide and Food Safety Regulators - Who Do They Work For? http://www.powerbase.info/index.php/File:Eu_pesticidefoodsafety.pdf

Testbiotech, 2010: European Food Safety Authority: A playing field for the biotech industry. <http://www.testbiotech.de/en/node/431>

link to the program of EFSA's workshop:

<http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/events/event/111012.htm>