

European Food Safety Authority plays down risks of Monsanto's genetically engineered oilseed rape

Testbiotech demands application for the placing on the market to be refused

25 July 2014 Testbiotech is accusing the European Food Safety Authority EFSA of deliberately playing down the risks of an uncontrolled spread of genetically modified oilseed rape. The cause for concern is an application filed by Monsanto for the import into the EU of viable transgenic oilseed rape MON88302 kernels, which are to be processed to oil and feed in Europe. Similar rape plants have already spread far beyond the fields in various regions of the world, for example along transport routes. EFSA actually assumes in its opinion that seeds will be lost during transport within the EU, and that the genetically engineered plants will grow in the environment. Nevertheless, EFSA came to the conclusion that the risk of transgenes spreading into the environment is low.

"Experience from importing countries such as Japan shows that EFSA's assumption is wrong. Even though officially no genetically engineered oilseed rape is grown in Japan, it can be found everywhere alongside the roads, ports and factories, where it is transported or processed. Once the transgenic plants become feral, they might propagate in the environment without detection for many years", Christoph Then of Testbiotech is warning. "If these plants cause economic or environmental damage, it may be too late for counter-measures if it becomes impossible to withdraw them from the environment."

Europe is a centre of biological diversity for oilseed rape and related species. Experts are warning that transgenic oilseed rape will be able to spread genetic material by crossing with wild relatives. Plant pollen can be carried over many kilometers by wind or insects. Seeds can be transported via the faeces of deer without losing the ability to germinate. Monsanto did present specific data on the viability of pollen and seeds of MON88302, but these were rejected by EFSA because the methodology used in the investigations was seriously flawed. The authority failed to ask for further assessments. Therefore, Testbiotech is accusing EFSA of declaring oilseed rape MON88302 to be safe even though there is no data to prove this claim.

In addition, Testbiotech is accusing the EFSA of serious errors in the assessment of health risks. According to Monsanto, MON88302 was especially designed to withstand even higher dosages and even more frequent applications of glyphosate herbicides (brands such as Roundup). But the EFSA neither took into account the level of residues in the crop, nor were any feeding studies required.

"In summary, EFSA's "don't look don't find"-approach is nothing more than a system to avoid a more detailed risk assessment of products derived from genetically engineered plants. By claiming that the Monsanto oilseed rape is safe in spite of the absence of reliable data, the authority is putting

human and animal health as well as the integrity of the environment at risk," explains Christoph Then.

Testbiotech calls on the EU-Commission and the German Government to reject EFSA's risk assessment and prevent the import of viable oilseed rape kernels into the EU.

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Further information

Testbiotech comment on opinion of EFSA: www.testbiotech.org/node/1079

Short version of the Testbiotech comment: www.testbiotech.org/node/1083

Further activities:

International call against spread of genetically engineered organisms:
www.stop-the-spread-of-transgenes.org/