

Seed giants active around new methods of genetic engineering

Soaring number of patent applications including those on farm animals

2 March 2016 / Testbiotech has published a report which for the first time gives an overview of patents filed by large corporations for the use of gene-editing and synthetic gene technology in food plants. According to the research presented in the report, DuPont and Dow Agrosciences are the corporates that have filed the highest number of patent applications for plants derived from the new methods. They are closely followed by German company, Bayer. In addition, there is an increasing number of patents being filed for the use of these methods in farm animals. The report provides examples of plants and animals derived from these new methods of genetic engineering, and points to the associated side-effects and risks.

Companies such as DuPont are demanding that the plants and animals derived from these new methods be allowed to be marketed and released into the environment without risk assessment or labelling. However, existing publications about recent applications already show the new methods cause many unintended effects and are not as precise as often claimed by industry.

„A closer look shows that these new techniques for genetic engineering show a similar range of unintended effects and risks as previous methods. It looks like some companies are trying to create a new image for their products to ease marketing and increase acceptance“, Christoph Then says for Testbiotech. “At the same time, more and more farm animals such as cows and pigs are being genetically engineered. Overall, this development could have major negative impacts on humans, animals, the environment and our food supply.”

Most of the relevant technological tools are tailored DNA-scissors developed to cut DNA at a targeted location. Synthetic DNA that can now be produced with and without a natural template is of further major relevance. These technologies might not always give rise to transgenic organisms incorporating DNA from other species, but must, nevertheless, always be regarded as methods of genetic engineering which need to be regulated. This is also made evident in the legal dossiers.

Testbiotech is demanding that the products derived from these new technologies are subjected to risk assessment and labelling regulation. Further we recommended that patents on plants and animals used in agriculture are prohibited.

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The report: www.testbiotech.org/node/1568