

Media release



Further genetically engineered ‘maize monsters’ about to be approved for import

Bayer maize is resistant to four herbicides and produces several insecticides – combinatorial effects not tested

26 February 2019 / The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) has signalled that it is in favour of approving further controversial genetically engineered maize variants produced by Bayer (Monsanto). The recent EFSA opinions published in January 2019, deal with two approval applications for maize developed through cross-breeding to combine several genetically engineered traits. The plants are resistant to up to four groups of herbicides (glyphosate, glufosinate, 2,4-D and AOPP) and produce up to six insecticides.

The genetically engineered maize is a crucial element of a business strategy that couples the marketing of patented seeds with herbicides. This concept has serious consequences for the protection of health and the environment: the plants inherit resistance to several herbicides and can therefore be sprayed with high dosages and mixtures of specific herbicides. Consequently, the residues from spraying will be present in the harvest, as will the insecticidal toxins produced in the maize.

In previous decision making the EU Commission has already approved several maize variants with similar characteristics. None of these were ever tested for combinatorial effects on health from mixtures of the toxic constituents in the respective food and feed products. The EU Commission, EFSA and industry are of the opinion that detailed investigations of the combinatorial effects are not necessary.

However, this assumption is highly questionable. Just recently, documents were published showing that EFSA had not correctly assessed immune system responses to Bt toxins. Currently, it cannot be ruled out that Bt toxins trigger allergies and other immune responses. Very high concentrations of Bt toxins can be found in some products derived from the maize. In addition, the health risks from the residues of spraying are still being discussed by scientists, and crucial data needed to conclude on safety are missing.

“Instead of giving priority to the protection of health and the environment, EFSA is paving the way for international trade and corporate interests,” says Christoph Then for Testbiotech. “And despite the majority of EU Member States and the EU Parliament repeatedly voting against imports of these crop plants, it is highly likely that the EU Commission will again give its approval.”

Currently, Testbiotech is aiming to make more detailed investigations mandatory for genetically engineered plants in a case brought before the EU court (case C-82/17 P). Unfortunately, as stated by the Attorney General in 2018, the EU Court does not seem to be in a position to request a further, more detailed risk assessment. The final decision of the court is expected in 2019.

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Further information:

Short background text on open questions regarding risk assessment of the genetically engineered maize (in German): www.testbiotech.org/node/2334

EFSA opinion on maize MON 89034 × 1507 × NK603 × DAS40278_9:
www.efsa.europa.eu/en/efsajournal/pub/5522

EFSA opinion on maize MON 89034 × 1507 × MON 88017 × 59122 × DAS40278-9:
www.efsa.europa.eu/en/efsajournal/pub/5521

Testbiotech assessment of the EFSA opinions:
www.testbiotech.org/node/2333

Information on the court case C-82/17 P:
www.testbiotech.org/en/eucourt