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Genetic engineering: MEPs increase pressure on EFSA

At the initiative of deputies **Maria Heubuch** (Greens, Germany), **Maria Noichl** (S&D, Germany), **Sirpa Pietikäinen** (EPP, Finland) and **Bart Staes** (Greens, Belgium), a public discussion on the risk assessment of GMOs took place on 15 September in Brussels. The panel included national experts from Austria, Germany and Norway that are dealing with the testing of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) at the national level and have submitted extensive scientific comments to EFSA (European Food Safety Authority). They presented their scientific objections to representatives from the European Commission and the EFSA.

MEPs summarize the results as follows: *"The experts have made it very clear that there is no scientific consensus on the safety of GMOs. The risk assessment by EFSA is based on an outdated concept. Many risks are not assessed: for instance, the combinatorial effects, the effects of pesticide use, and the possibility of uncontrolled spread are all disregarded. It is particularly worrying that the researchers do not have adequate access to GMO materials for scientific purposes, since GMOs are protected by patents. In this way, critical research on the risks of GMOs is rendered impossible."*

"The risk assessment procedure needs to be improved and there needs to be a real dialogue about the scientific comments from the Member States. We need to keep pesticide-resistant plants off the fields and ensure strict risk assessment for plants that were produced using new biotechnological methods. It is worrying to see that the EU-Commission is working in the opposite direction. We are appalled at the letter which has been brought to the attention of the public a few days ago. In the letter, the EFSA thanked the EU-Commission for a remarkable task it had been given: to consider which parts of risk assessment might be dropped when importing genetically contaminated food and feed. So instead of strengthening the precautionary principle and improving the risk assessment, new holes are to be drilled! This would mean giving up control over what we eat and letting the governments of other countries decide. It needs to be seen in the context of the ongoing trade negotiations with the US and Canada that are explicitly asking for less risk assessment."

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