

Safety of EU approved GM maize: EFSA confirms that France got it all wrong (again...)

On 20 February 2012, France provided to the European Commission with a ‘new’ scientific argumentation in support of its renewed request for the prohibition of the placing on the market of the genetically modified (GM) maize MON 810 according to Article 34 of Regulation (EC) No 1829/2003. This request was accompanied by a statement that in case the Commission could not agree to the French request to ban the specific GM maize, it would have to act unilaterally to prevent any damage or harm. All this, of course, has been caused by the fact that both the French High Court and the European Court of Justice found France in breach of the European legislation with its earlier decisions to ban the marketing of GM maize on its territory. Both courts confirmed that France had produced no scientific evidence of any relevance to support its accusation that the maize in question was unsafe. Still, France immediately announced that it would do all it could to renew the ban anyway. As usual, the European Commission requested the European Food Safety Authority’s Panel on Genetically Modified Organisms (EFSA GMO Panel) to evaluate the documentation submitted by France in support of its request. The Panel pointed out that some publications referred to by France as ‘new scientific evidence’ were in fact already part of its submission and consequent decision in 2008 (the one that was later found illegal by the Courts). But also in the remaining documentation the Panel could not identify any new science-based evidence indicating that maize MON 810 cultivation in the EU poses a significant and imminent risk to the human and animal health or the environment. Also with regard to management and monitoring of maize MON 810, the Panel found no evidence of risk to human and animal health or the environment that would support a ban of the GM maize as an emergency measure. Here, the EFSA GMO Panel confirmed its evaluation of the Post Market Environmental Monitoring results that had identified no adverse effects of the GM maize in question during the 2009 and 2010 growing seasons. “We now have it black on white: the banning of GM maize in France is not based on science, nor is it based on new ‘evidence’ and proper safety evaluations. It is a purely political measure.”, Garlich von Essen, Secretary General of the European Seed Association comments on the new EFSA evaluation. “This also sends an important message to the still on-going negotiations on a possible re-nationalisation of GM authorisations. Safety must be determined on EU level. We cannot have products that are considered safe, but only for some of our citizens. There can be only one level of safety for all Europeans.” It now remains to be seen how the newly elected French government and its newly appointed Minister (who happens to be a former member of the European Parliament) will react to the clear and crisp findings of Europe’s top scientists.

Garlich von Essen
Secretary General