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## **Fresh on the Market**

### **Controversial GM corn arrives in Europe**

**The German TV show “Report München” recently presented a TV special by Astrid Halder and Hendrik Loven about the GM corn ‘SmartStax’ and the background of the GM approval process in the European Union.**

It could be science fiction: A GM corn that produces sufficient insecticides to defend itself against pests, and is resistant against almost unlimited herbicide use. Animals for human consumption are then fed this GM corn.

This may become a reality in Germany.

‘SmartStax’ is the super GM corn produced by the US company Monsanto. The agro-giant has been successful in completing most of the EU approval process, and SmartStax is now close to final approval as a legalized animal feed.

We travelled to France to see the molecular biologist and GM critic Professor Seralini (University of Caen, France). He has studied GM corn and is warning of the dangers of SmartStax: “It is the worst one, it contains six pesticides. That is a pesticide bomb. 6 insecticides, not properly tested regarding health risks (...) and the public authorities are not able to demand these tests.”

Up until now, all permissions given for SmartStax have been based on studies paid for by Monsanto.

Seralini’s worries are based on his own investigation. Over a period of two years he fed a group of rats with GM corn (as opposed to the standard 90 day studies undertaken by Monsanto). After two years a number of the rats had tumours and were sterile. Seralini’s study was predictably controversial, with Monsanto and others quick to rubbish his methodology. A Monsanto statement said: “There is no study in the world which shows a toxic impact of GM feeding stuff.”

Monsanto is one of the biggest transnational biotech and agricultural corporations in the world, achieving sales of many billions of Euros per annum, mainly generated by license fees for GM seeds.

But there is another indication why SmartStax can be considered somewhat risky. Recently an Australian scientist Judy Carman published a study about feeding a group of swine with GM feed, which resulted in them being severely impacted by gastroenteritis. In response,, Monsanto claimed that the study was not objective.

During the interview with Report Munich, the German Federal Agency of Nature Conservation advised against giving permission for SmartStax.



Beatrix Tappeser, Federal Agency of Nature Conservation, stated: “There we have the problem that the applicant did not provide sufficient data to evaluate e.g., interdependencies between single genes, proteins and the toxic insecticide produced by the plant. From the perspective of protection of Nature and Environment, this is a significant deficiency.”

Why did nobody listen to this Federal Agency? We travelled to Bonn to meet an insider: Wolfgang Koehler, former head of the division for Genetic Engineering in the German Federal Ministry of Agriculture. It is his first TV interview. All documents, such as those from Monsanto, had to pass his desk.

Wolfgang Koehler: “From my point of view there was practically no difference between Monsanto and the US Administration. Very often the US Administration applied pressure if applications for approval of US products or GM constructs were affected. This was made evident by diplomatic letters written in 2008 and published by WikiLeaks.

The pressure from the US Administration seems to have been effective. Now, five years on the formerly very (GM) critical Germany will prepare the path for SmartStax approval. During the essential voting in Brussels, Germany abstained from voting, meaning it did not vote against the application. Now, the GM-friendly EU Commission can make the decision, and it is likely to approve the application.

A few days ago, we asked the responsible secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture about the process that had been followed, during the CSU party congress.

Ilse Aigner, Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture: “The voting behaviour would not have changed anything. The basic point is that we had no qualified majorities -either pro or con. Now the EU Commission has to make a decision”

She makes it easy for herself. But what kind of impact will Smartstax have for people? The GM corn will be sprayed with Glyphosate, the controversial weedkiller. This plant toxin has come under suspicion as a cause of infertility in men. Glyphosate is already available in the EU and with SmartStax it would be distributed more broadly. Environmental groups are alarmed: SmartStax has a high tolerance of heavy doses of Glyphosate, which means the latter would probably be used more intensively. As a result, the burden for both humans and nature would inevitably increase.

The German Friends of the Earth (BUND) tested human urine across 18 EU countries. Heike Moldenhauer, BUND for Protection of Environment and Nature in Germany e.V.: “To look at Germany, we took 10 samples (of urine) and in 7 of them (70%) we found Glyphosate, which has probably been ingested with food.”

These investigations were rejected by Monsanto, who argued that there were insufficient samples. We wanted to verify the result and so decided to test the result ourselves. We took samples of urine from two reporters and gave them to a laboratory in Bremen. After a few days we received the results. Dr. Hoppe, Medical Laboratory Bremen: “in the first sample we really found Glyphosate in a significant quantity. In the second sample the concentration was much lower.”



Glyphosate, a herbicide, was found in human urine. In fact the quantity of glyphosate was below the defined limits, but doubts remain.

Why are scientists who are critical of Glyphosate and genetically modified plants such as SmartStaxx ignored?

Wolfgang Koehler, former head of the division for Genetic Engineering in the German Federal Ministry of Agriculture: “If a scientist represents critical positions against genetically engineering, they would be more or less “away from the window”, that means, they would never again get money from the industry and would practically no longer be able to do their job. After all, my confidence is (...) severely limited.”