Monsanto launched a PR offensive to try to spread doubt about a study published two days ago by French scientist Gilles-Éric Séràlini: the study showed that the biotech giant's flagship herbicide, Roundup, and one the GM maizes produced by the firm, NK603, are having disastrous effects on rats' health when those are studied during their lifetime and not over the industry-favoured 90 days.

In an email seen by CEO (see below), a Monsanto executive sent around the list of reactions compiled by a so-called “independent” science news resource, the London-based “Science Media Centre”. Under the objective-sounding title “Expert reaction to GM maize causing tumours in rats”, the Centre lists eight reactions by scientists about the study as well as 10 unattributed arguments on the same issue. Unsurprisingly, all the reactions dismiss the study. According to Spinwatch, 70% of the Centre's funding comes from corporations, and their list of funders includes most of the big names in the biotech industry. This misinformation seems to have worked: the three critical quotes mentioned by the newswire Reuters
French scientist Gilles-Eric Séralini indeed hit the headlines yesterday with his groundbreaking paper on rats being fed with Monsanto's GM Roundup-ready maize NK603, published in the authoritative scientific journal Food and Chemical Toxicology. “The longest and most detailed study ever carried out on a herbicide and a GMO”, in Séralini’s own words yesterday at a press conference in the European Parliament, looked at the impact on rats' health of both the GMO and Roundup, the herbicide it is made to resist. Roundup is the world's most sold herbicide.

The results of the study are stunning. Not only did the rats tested with Roundup die earlier than their control group, developing severe tumours and kidney and liver pathologies, but the rats only fed with the GM maize also developed tumours.

This new development in the decade-long controversy over the safety of GMOs highlights the importance of reliable expertise for public decision-making, and the key role played by regulatory agencies. It is striking that Séralini's study's initial funding came from CERES, an association funded by major French supermarkets; being wary of both official studies and the possibility of a new major mad cow-type public health scandal, they decided to provide enough resources to produce a reliable risk assessment. CEO's publications on the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) over the past year have shown how the biotech and pesticide industry had been able to influence the so-called “independent voice of science” at the EU level. Many experts on key panels had conflicts of interest, which resulted in flawed guidelines for risk assessment.

One example? The very GM maize used in Professor Séralini's paper was given the green light by EFSA for feed and food use in Europe in 2004, and for cultivation in the EU in 2009. EFSA based its assessment on a narrow range of studies that tested rats for a short period of only 90 days. Séralini points out that in his new research most of the tumors among the rats he studied only appeared after the first year. CEO has shown that more than half of the GMO panel experts who signed the approval for this GM maize had links with industry resulting in conflicts of interest, as defined by the OECD. Séralini in his press conference yesterday attacked the “competence and even the honesty” of the EFSA experts at stake.

In particular the GMO panel chair, Harry Kuiper, clearly used his position to influence the work of the panel in a pro-industry way. The role played by Kuiper for 10 years is now under scrutiny of the European Ombudsman, following a complaint by the organisation Testbiotech. EFSA's policy on conflicts of interests has slightly improved since new panels were installed last July, but far from enough: CEO, Earth Open Source, Testbiotech and other NGOs have shown that several EFSA panel members still have conflict of interests with industry.

EFSA's guidelines for GMO risk assessment are now about to be incorporated in new EU rules on GMOs. These guidelines actually further weaken the existing rules, not only saying that long-term trials are not needed but that 90-days trials, and even feeding trials themselves, may be scrapped entirely! The Commission's head of unit at DG Health and Consumers, Mrs. Dorothée André, tried some damage control yesterday saying that the Commission would propose mandatory 90-days trials to Member States within the framework of these guidelines' revision process, on which the European Parliament has no say.
Translation from Spanish: “On this page [link] you can read the opinion of a few independent scientists on this new publication, which has not yet been reviewed by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA).” Some details were removed in order to protect the source.

Attached files:
- monsanto email.png

MEDIA COVERAGE

Polémique sur la toxicité des OGM: ces conflits d'intérêts qui nuisent à la science
L'offensive de Monsanto pour décrédibiliser l'étude sur les OGM

SIMILAR ENTRIES

NGOs demand dismissal of two EFSA experts who failed to declare food industry links
New research has today revealed further conflicts of interest among experts advising the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) about the safety of food additives, including aspartame [1]. Research by Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO) and Réseau Environnement Santé/French Network on Health and Environment (RES) found that two of the new experts appointed by EFSA to the panel responsible for looking at food additives have failed to declare consulting activities for the food industry-funded think tank and lobby group International Life Sciences Institute (ILSI)

Independence of EFSA's GMO risk assessment challenged
Food safety panel members "update" declarations of interest – admitting industry ties

Séralini vs Fellous: a GMO libel case

EFSA Chair Moves to Food Industry Lobby Group
Study on Monsanto's GM maize intensifies concerns about EFSA's reliability – Monsanto strikes back with PR offensive
Evaluation report on EFSA gives the wrong message
Letter from EOS and CEO: Continued ILSI activities of EFSA panel members
Conflicts of interest still evident on new ESFA expert panels
EFSA nutrition panel on France 2: No link between sugar and obesity?

RECENT BLOGS

Official complaint made re. inaccuracies in Transparency Register

Not about safer banks

After the first round of the expert groups battle

What was discussed during Commissioner Rehn's meetings with Goldman Sachs? Euro Commissioner has a transparency problem

Call for Internship

LATEST TWEETS

Proposed #EU banking union will not help reign in irresponsible banking sector; supervision will be based on lax rules http://t.co/hiiXa8os
We have submitted complaints about law firms Reed Smith & Linklaters who fail to disclose clients in #EU lobby register http://t.co/NjBdT8Sx
We've submitted four new complaints to secretariat of #EU Transparency Register incl one about biotech lobby Europabio http://t.co/NjBdT8Sx
EU #lobby register still contains flawed date and incomplete entries @PSEurope_News http://t.co/ic1oaalw
Could #EFSA advice on GM be used to make decision on #GM maize (article in French) http://t.co/YZCXrgrv

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