

Leading European Food Safety Authority Staff Member Moves into Industry

Scientific coordinator of GMO panel moves to Syngent

10. November 2009

Munich Parma

Munich/ Parma - A leading staff member of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) has quit to work in industry. Suzy Renckens, scientific coordinator of the GMO panel, officially represented Syngenta in an expert hearing at EU level in 2008. She now holds a position there as Head of Biotech Regulatory Affairs for Europe, Africa and the Middle East. The Swiss company Syngenta is one of the world's leading producers of genetically engineered plants. At the EFSA Mrs Renckens headed the GMO panel which has been responsible for developing guidance documents and the risk assessment of genetically engineered plants since the authority was established in 2002. She worked in that position until the end of 2007 and represented the EFSA in several meetings with industry. Previous to her position at the EFSA she worked in the same field for licensing authorities in Belgium. Her direct move from the EFSA to Syngenta might damage the reputation of the authority since it has already been criticised for being too close to the interests of industry.

"This move to industry poses a considerable problem for the EFSA," says Christoph Then, executive director of the German expert group Testbiotech. "It has become apparent that even staff members in leading positions are unable to distance themselves from industry. It also begs the question of why the EFSA does not make information on such unusual steps public. There is absolutely no transparency at all in the circumstances surrounding the direct move by Mrs Renckens from the EFSA to industry."

The EFSA declined to make any detailed comments on this case. After Testbiotech became aware of Renckens' move it filed a questionnaire directly to the EFSA. Emphasis was placed on the question of whether Syngenta might have made unjustifiably benefited by acquiring one of EFSA's leading staff members. The EFSA stated that it is unable to provide information related to individual staff members. According to EU staff regulations, all moves must be approved when EU employees take up a new position where there may be a possible conflict of interests with EU authorities. Testbiotech believes that the circumstances of this move should be made transparent. EU regulations further state that a move without approval is possible only after two years. In Mrs Renckens' case the maximum period of time between her engagement with the EFSA and her position at Syngenta is one year.

Contact:

For further information please contact

Christoph Then, executive director, Tel 0151 54 63 80 40 or

Andrea Reiche, press officer, Tel +49 (0)89 35 89 92 76

Testbiotech e.V. Institute for Impact Assessment of Biotechnology

Frohschammerstr. 14, 80807 Munich, Germany

Tel: 089 - 35 89 92 76

Further information:

[Interview mit Suzy Renckens](#)

[Document Renckens bei Syngenta](#)

["Freunde der Erde" über EFSA](#)

[Report Kontrolle oder Kollaboration?](#)

[EU Staff Regulations](#)

Attachment

Size

[testbiotech press release 10112009_Renckens.pdf](#)

74.82 KB

| [Deutsch](#) | [Printer-friendly version](#) | [Send to friend](#) |

Parma, 11 JAN 2010
Ref OR/SG/DD/rl (2009) – out-4499402

E-mail: christoph.then@testbiotech.org

Re: Your requests of 8 November 2009 and of 24 November 2009

Dear Mr Then,

Thank you very much for your message of 8 November 2009 in which you request further information and for your request of 24 November 2009 regarding access to documents to Ms. Renckens' case.

First, for what concerns your request for further information, please allow me to highlight that as already outlined in my previous communication dated 4 November 2009 (our ref. OR/DD (nm) 2009 – 4408336), EFSA is subject to precise obligations concerning processing personal data and to precise limits regarding the right of access to documents.

As you may be aware, Ms Renckens was Head of the GMO Unit from 01/04/2003 to 31/03/2008. The Unit to which she was assigned provided the Secretariat to the Scientific Panel on Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO Panel). As Head of the GMO Unit, she managed the scientific and administrative staff of the Unit, with the objective of providing the Scientific Panel with the appropriate secretarial support.

All Heads of Units of EFSA are appointed following a public call for expressions of interests. The specific requirements EFSA considered as essential for the position of Head of the GMO Unit are laid down in the call.

All applications received by EFSA are evaluated against the eligibility and selection criteria and a comparative assessment of all the applications received was carried out.

EFSA applies a strict Policy on Declarations of Interests¹. EFSA DOI Policy ensures the independence of scientific experts and EFSA staff members alike. In this respect, it should be highlighted that EFSA decided to apply the requirement to declare interests also to members of its staff who carry out administrative, advisory, linguistic and scientific duties, although that is not a legal requirement foreseen in EFSA's Founding regulation or in the Staff regulations applicable to EFSA staff. However, EFSA is also bound by the Staff Regulations applicable to its staff, as adopted by the Council, and cannot enforce legal requirements different from those foreseen therein. Therefore, EFSA did not add for its staff and former staff any limitations in addition to those foreseen by the mentioned Staff Regulations.

¹ The Policy and its implementing acts are available on EFSA's website at the following link: http://www.efsa.europa.eu/EFSA/AboutEfsa/WhoWeAre/efsa_locale-1178620753812_DeclarationsInterest.htm

Secondly, as regards your request on access to documents please find enclosed the requested documents. No objections were raised by EFSA.

Thank you very much for your interest in EFSA's scientific activities.

Yours sincerely,



Olivier Ramsayer

Enclosures: 2

Head of department moves from European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) to biotech company within two months

Authorities react only after Testbiotech disclosures

14. January 2010

Munich / Parma

The former head of the GMO-panel at the European Food Safety Authority EFSA, Suzy Renckens, has moved directly into the genetic engineering industry without any objections or restrictions being imposed by the authority. This was revealed in documents sent by the EFSA upon request to the group of experts at Testbiotech, Germany.

The move to the company Syngenta, took place in May 2008 although Mrs Renckens only terminated her employment contract with the EFSA at the end of March. After Testbiotech made this information public, the EFSA executive management responded in December 2009. According to EU staff regulations former members of EU public services have to ask for approval from their institutions for new positions. This has to be done within a period of two years after leaving the institution. In Mrs Renckens' case the authority had neither raised any objections whatsoever nor had it imposed any conditions.

Christoph Then, executive director of Testbiotech e.V., said, "The executive management of the authority has been negligent in its duty of care. Mrs Renckens' direct move into industry should not have been approved. The EFSA executive management apparently lacks sufficient awareness of the problem. The procedure is portrayed by the authority as completely normal."

Testbiotech reported on this problem for the first time on 10 November 2009 and sent an official letter of enquiry to the EFSA. A reply arrived on 11 January 2009, clearly exceeding the permissible period of time for a reply. Together with its reply, the EFSA sent a number of different emails which had been exchanged between Mrs Renckens and the authority. According to these Mrs Renckens worked for the EFSA from April 2003 until 31 March 2008, and on 19 May 2008 told her former work colleagues in an email that she now had an executive position at Syngenta.

In her own words she said that in future she would also be approaching the authority personally in regard to marketing approval for genetically engineered plants. In her previous position at the EFSA she had been in charge of precisely this group of experts dealing with such applications.

"With such proximity to industry, the question is just how independently can the authority act in making decisions on the licensing of genetically engineered organisms," said Christoph Then. "The EU commission should make its stance clear on this issue."

It was not until December 2009, after Testbiotech had made its report and journalists began questioning the authority, that the executive management of the EFSA contacted Mrs Renckens and pointed out that her work was subject to approval for up to two years after her resignation. Mrs Renckens replied that the EFSA already knew about her work. In her new capacity she had, amongst other things, taken part in a meeting between the authority and the EU Commission in March 2009.

Testbiotech demands that the EFSA has to face consequences and should be reorganised. Testbiotech will also be contacting the EU Commission on the matter.

Contact:

For further information please contact:

Dr. Christoph Then, Tel.: 0151- 54 63 80 40

or Andrea Reiche, Tel: 089 - 35 89 92 76

Testbiotech e. V.

Institute for Independent Impact Assessment in Biotechnology

Frohschammerstr. 14, 80807 München

Tel: 089-35 89 92 76

Fax: 089-359 66 22

info@testbiotech.org 

www.testbiotech.org

Further information:

[First press release about Suzy Renckens](#)

[About EFSA's work](#)

Attachment

Size

[EFSA Ref. 4499402.pdf](#)

433.36 KB

[Deutsch](#) | [Printer-friendly version](#) | [Send to friend](#) |

Close EFSA's open doors to industry!

Joint letter sent by NGOs to alert the EU Commission

21. January 2010

Munich / Brussels

Four NGOs, Testbiotech, Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO Brussels), Friends of the Earth Europe (FOE), and Lobbycontrol are now jointly addressing the EU Commission about a scandal involving a leading member of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) who moved directly into the agribusiness company Syngenta. They are calling for a thorough investigation of the circumstances and urging the commission to take immediate action.

“So far no appropriate action has been taken by the EFSA”, says Christoph Then from Testbiotech. “The Commission must react to this new case of an EU official going through revolving doors. There is a clear conflict with the legitimate interests of the EFSA”.

It was recently made public that the former head of the EFSA's GMO panel, Suzy Renckens, had become Head of Biotech Regulatory Affairs for Europe, Africa and Middle East (EAME) at Syngenta just one month after she quit the EFSA. In her own words, Ms Renckens now lobbies for Syngenta to influence EU decision-making on genetically engineered organisms. This is the very same issue she was responsible for regulating with the EFSA.

“In cases like this, a tightly enforced cooling-off period is essential for several reasons. Former staff members and especially decision makers from EU authorities can exploit their previous status to unduly influence their former colleagues. However the EFSA did not raise any objections or impose any obligations in relation to this direct move into industry of one of its leading staff members,” explains Nina Katzemich from Lobbycontrol.

Members of EU public services are supposed to ask for approval from their institutions for any new post within a period of two years of leaving. The EFSA only appeared to act on this conflict after it was highlighted by the NGO Testbiotech. EFSA sent several e-mails to Ms Renckens at the end of 2009 reminding her of her obligations – long after she was informed about the new situation. Ms Renckens had already informed EFSA in May 2008 that she had started work at Syngenta.

Contact:

For further information please contact:

Christoph Then, executive director, Tel.: +49 (0)151 54 63 80 40 and

Nina Katzemich, Lobbycontrol, Tel.: +49 (0)221 169 65 07 oder +49 (0)179 509 30 22

nina.katzemich@lobbycontrol.de ✉

Andrea Reiche, press officer, Tel +49 (0)89 35 89 92 76

Testbiotech e. V.

Institute for Independent Impact Assessment in Biotechnology

Frohschammerstr. 14, 80807 München

Fon: +49 (0)89-358 99 92 76

Fax: +49 (0)89-359 66 22

info@testbiotech.org ✉

www.testbiotech.org

Executive Director: Christoph Then

Attachment

Size

[letter commission 4 ngos_EFSA-1.pdf](#)

354.15 KB

| [Deutsch](#) | [Printer-friendly version](#) | [Send to friend](#) |

EFSA's revolving door to biotech industry unacceptable

NGOs file complaints to EU Ombudsman and Commission

24. March 2010

Munich / Strassbourg

The Germany-based NGO Testbiotech has today filed an official complaint with the European Ombudsman against EFSA, the EU's food safety agency. The complaint targets EFSA's decision to allow Suzy Renckens, head of EFSA's GMO Unit, to become a lobbyist for biotech giant Syngenta, without any 'cooling off' period or other restrictions. Ms Renckens move to become a leading lobbyist for one of the major biotech companies in Europe implies an obvious conflict of interest.

"It is unacceptable that EFSA failed to act to prevent conflicts of interest in the case of Ms Renckens' move to Syngenta, considering the agency's powers over food safety decisions in Europe", says Christoph Then of Testbiotech. "As the two-year period within which officials need permission has still not passed, EFSA should immediately impose a ban on Ms Renckens lobbying to influence EFSA."

Testbiotech and Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO) have today also written to Commission's president Barroso insisting that the Commission must intervene to make EFSA tighten its conflicts of interest checks. The NGOs had written to the Commission before to raise concerns about the Renckens case after it emerged that no "cooling off" period had been enforced. The Commission's consumer affairs department (DG SANCO) replied it is not responsible for EFSA, which is an independent EU agency.

"The Commission is denying all responsibility for the activities of the European Food Safety Agency", says Nina Holland of Corporate Europe Observatory. "The Renckens case however reveals a bigger problem of undue industry influence at EFSA, feeding to existing doubts concerning EU food safety decisions."

According to the informations available, Ms Renckens informed EFSA of her new appointment by Syngenta in 2008. Although EFSA then had the right to take appropriate action, the authority accepted Dr Renckens' move and did not impose any obligations. Only in November 2009, after Testbiotech had criticised the case, EFSA contacted Ms Renckens and reminded her of her obligations in relation to confidentiality.

Contact:

For further information please contact:

Christoph Then, Testbiotech Tel.: +49 (0)151 54 63 80 40 and

Nina Holland, Corporate Europe Observatory, +32 (0)28 93 09 30 or +32 497 38 96 32

Corporate Europe Observatory

Rue d'Edimbourg 26,1050 Brussels

Belgium

0032 (0)2 893 0930

Andrea Reiche, press officer, Tel +49 (0)89 35 89 92 76

Testbiotech e. V.

Institute for Independent Impact Assessment in Biotechnology

Frohschammerstr. 14, 80807 München

Fon: +49 (0)89-358 99 92 76

Fax: +49 (0)89-359 66 22

info@testbiotech.org 

www.testbiotech.org

Executive Director: Christoph Then

Attachment**Size**[Testbiotech complaint EU Ombudsman_fin.pdf](#)

269.15 KB

[PR 24_03_2010 Testbiotech.pdf](#)

101.62 KB

[Deutsch](#) | [Printer-friendly version](#) | [Send to friend](#) |