

PRESS RELEASE

Global research consortium presents findings on long-term studies of genetically modified foods

On Thursday, March 8th, the European Commission Framework 7-funded GMSAFOOD consortium will announce significant results regarding the safety of GM foods to members of the press, as part of a three day conference to disseminate the results of over three years of research by Austrian, Australian, Norwegian, Irish, Turkish, and Hungarian scientists. The press conference will be held in English.

One study, conducted at the Medical University Vienna, refutes the findings of a 2005 study by Prescott et al., which initiated extensive controversy with the claim that field peas modified to inhibit alpha-amylase induce an allergic response in mice. After the 2005 study, development of the GM pea was immediately abandoned. The incident is regularly cited by those on both sides of the GM debate as an example of either the inherent dangers of genetically modified foods or the effectiveness of pre-market studies in identifying potential risk factors. The latest findings by the MedUni Vienna call for a re-evaluation of both positions.

One of the consortium's most urgent contributions is its proposal for a novel approach to post-market monitoring. Despite the 114,507 hectares of biotech crops planted in the EU in 2011 (www.isaaa.org), there is currently no adequate system in place for monitoring the effects of GMOs on animal and human health once a crop has been approved for market, with current emphasis placed almost entirely on pre-market testing. Given the inadequacy of a traditional epidemiological approach to monitoring GMOs in the marketplace, the consortium proposes a "clustering and neural network"-type machine-learning framework to identify potential biomarkers capable of detecting unforeseen health risks. Such biomarkers could also be useful in predicting immune responses of multiple species to future genetically modified organisms. This methodology, coupled with meta-analysis of data within a prospective public repository, would significantly complement current pre-market testing procedures.

Other findings to be presented at the conference include those of a three year study conducted by the Irish Agriculture and Food Development Association in which pigs were fed genetically modified corn. The corn, modified to produce the insect-resistant Bt toxin, was grown in Spain. These and other findings from GMSAFOOD research teams will be presented at the GMSAFOOD conference at the Medical University of Vienna, Austria 6-8 March 2012, including:

- Salmon feeding trials (Norway)
- Investigation of human immune response to potential allergens in GM peas using human-SCID mice (Austria)
- Food chain studies where rats were fed pork and fish which had been raised on Bt-corn (Norway)
- Epitope mapping and antibody determinations (Hungary)

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Media are invited to attend the press conference on 8th March (9:30am-11am) as well as any of the other GMSAFOOD conference sessions.

Internationally recognized researchers to present keynote addresses will include:

- Gerhard Flachowsky, EFSA GMO safety committee member, will present a talk on GMOs in animal nutrition
- Richard Goodman, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, will present his work on the potential allergenicity of GMOs intended for human consumption
- Gerard Barry, International Rice Research Institute, will review the experience and future of products from GM Crops
- Anne Constable from the Nestle Research Centre and Alan Kristal, University of Washington, will discuss epidemiological issues surrounding post market surveillance for novel foods
- Helmut Gaugitsch from the Environment Agency Austria, Sandy Lawrie from the Food Standards Agency in the UK, and Yves Bertheau from INRA France will join in a panel discussion on the 8th to discuss risk assessment and policy issues.

GMSAFOOD PRESS CONFERENCE

Thursday 8 March, 9:30 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

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GMSAFOOD Consortium: Medical University of Vienna, Irish Agriculture and Food Development Authority, Norwegian School of Veterinary Science, Central Food Research Institute, Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, and Troyka, Techno-Park of the Middle East Technical University.

Further details on the project and conference registration can be found here:

<http://www.gmsafoodproject.eu/>