

EU research project GRACE publishes first study findings

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The project is investigating which methods are suitable for assessing the risk of genetically modified plants.

The safety of genetically modified (GM) plants has long been a subject of controversy. A key question is which test methods can reliably identify the medium- and long-term health impacts of eating GM crops. The GRACE research project was asked by the European Commission to test various methods for this purpose. They included 90-day and one-year animal feeding trials with rodents, and *in vitro* methods, which can for instance be used to test the effects of GM plants on cell cultures.

The feeding trial

In this [study](#), which was published recently in *Archives of Toxicology*, scientists conducted a 90-day feeding trial on rats. The animals were given two different varieties of MON810 GM maize. The control groups were given the non-GM parent variety or one of four conventional maize varieties as part of their diet. The results showed that the two GM maize varieties tested did not trigger any negative effects in the trial animals.

The study systematically implemented and validated the guidance issued by the European Food Safety Authority in 2011 for 90-day feeding trials with whole GM plant material. In 2013, the European Commission passed an implementing regulation making this type of feeding trial mandatory for the authorisation of GM plants. At the same time, the EU-funded GRACE research project was tasked with checking whether such studies can in fact provide additional information for risk assessments of GM plants. The recent publication does not yet provide any answers to this question. Conclusions concerning any potential added scientific value of these trials for risk assessments will be drawn only once the one-year feeding study is complete and alternative *in vitro* methods have been tested. There are also plans to involve a broad spectrum of stakeholders in the evaluation of the results.

Transparency and stakeholder involvement: fundamental principles of GRACE

The study plans and conclusions from the results obtained to date have been discussed during extensive consultations with stakeholders. The relevant consultation reports are published on the GRACE project website. For reasons of transparency, GRACE also publishes all the raw data from the studies it has conducted. These will soon be available via the CADIMA database.

In addition to GRACE, two other research projects are currently testing the suitability of extended feeding trials for assessing the health risks of GM plants: another EU research project, G-TwYST, and a French project, GMO90+, have agreed a joint [publication strategy](#) with GRACE, as well as shared use of plant material and samples and unrestricted data sharing. There are plans to publish all the results of these projects as open-access papers in the specialist journal *Archives of Toxicology*. Other experts in the field, stakeholders and interested members of the public are invited to take part in a scientific discussion of the results. Comments on the publications can be submitted in the form of letters to the editor. These contributions will be published in *Archives of Toxicology* together with responses from the relevant research projects.

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