GRACE opens forum for public debate of its 90-day feeding study with MON810 maize

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GRACE, the EU research project, is inviting experts, stakeholders and interested members of the public to take part in a scientific discussion of the results of its recently published 90-day feeding study with genetically modified MON810 maize. Comments can be submitted to the journal *Archives of Toxicology* in the form of letters to the editor. The first comments, including a statement from GRACE on the recent criticism of the study results by Testbiotech e.V., will be published in January 2015.

The European Commission has asked the GRACE research project to test various methods for assessing the medium- and long-term health impacts of eating genetically modified (GM) crops. The methods include 90-day feeding studies with rats. The results of the first feeding study were published by scientists belonging to the GRACE consortium in October 2014. According to the paper, the scientists found no indication of any toxicologically relevant effects in the trial animals caused by feeding them GM MON810 maize. At the same time, GRACE announced that there would be a public forum for scientific discussion of these and subsequent project results.

In November, Testbiotech publicly criticised the study in a background report and press releases and in a reply to an open letter published by the GRACE consortium. Among other things, Testbiotech accused the research project of having drawn the wrong conclusions from the trial data and of having "manipulated" the results. It therefore calls for the paper to be withdrawn.

The coordinator of GRACE, Prof. Joachim Schiemann, responded to the criticism in an open letter to Dr Christoph Then (Testbiotech). He clearly dismisses the manipulation allegation and provides a detailed response to the toxicology-related criticisms. Schiemann emphasises that the primary aim of the GRACE research project is to test the scientific value and implementation details of various methods for assessing the safety of GM crops. The tests are not intended to prove the safety of MON810 maize or GM crops in general. For this reason alone, he claims, there was no motive to manipulate the data. In addition, Schiemann points out that the study went through a proper peer review process by external experts before the paper was published, so it will not be withdrawn.

Schiemann also emphasises the transparency principle to which the project adheres. "Our statement that MON810 maize does not trigger any detrimental effects on the trial animals is the result of comprehensive discussion among the scientists of the GRACE consortium. Other experts may draw other conclusions." For this reason, the GRACE consortium ensured from the start of the project that its research methods and results (including all the raw data from the trials) can be assessed independently by external experts and other interested parties. To date, GRACE has invited more than 700 stakeholders to take part through various consultation rounds. The organisations that took part in these discussions, the arguments put forward and the project team's responses are/will be documented in detail and published on the project website.

To mark the opening of the *Archives of Toxicology* forum, Schiemann is inviting Testbiotech and all other interested parties to take part in a transparent, scientific discussion. "In this way, different interpretations of the available test data can be presented in detail and openly discussed," says Schiemann. Comments on the feeding study (up to 2000 words, no more than 10 references) can be submitted to the Editor-in-Chief of the journal *Archives of Toxicology* (Prof. Jan G. Hengstler, archtox@ifado.de). Background information on the feeding study and on Testbiotech's criticisms are available on the GRACE project website.

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GRACE
GMO Risk Assessment and Communication of Evidence

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Related Keywords:

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