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EU Parliament votes for more transparency of food safety studies

In a plenary vote today, the European Parliament endorsed the deal agreed with Member States¹ on a proposal to end secrecy around scientific studies on food safety.

When a company wants to market a new food additive, pesticide or GMO, it submits studies to the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) to show its product is safe. Under the reformed legislation, EFSA will have to publish these studies at an early stage of the risk assessment process.

Confidential treatment will only be granted to a closed list of non-safety related information items, provided industry can prove that publication would cause commercial harm.

BEUC Director General, Monique Goyens, commented:

"With these new rules, the EU is taking transparency to the next level. Public controversies around glyphosate, aspartame or bisphenol A have eroded consumer confidence in the way the EU decides what food is safe and what is not. It was high time the EU stopped the secrecy around the studies EFSA relies on for its assessment of substances that end up in our food."

BEUC also welcomes that food industry will have to notify EFSA of any safety study it commissions. A list of these studies will be compiled in a publicly accessible database managed by EFSA.

Monique Goyens added:

"The database of all studies – both finished and unfinished – will prevent that any industry research giving unfavourable results is hidden away, if not stopped at the lab stage.

"We will have to remain vigilant, however, on how the new transparency rules work in practice. Independent scientists should be able to access, use and quote safety data produced by the food industry without having to seek permission."

However, the new regulation could easily have gone further on making decisions around food safety more transparent to the public.

Monique Goyens added:

¹ The EU institutions reached an agreement on the deal last February. See Council [press release](#).

“EU policy makers should also have lifted the lid on the political choices made to address the safety risks identified by EFSA. To regain trust, consumers must know why an option is chosen over another to address a given risk. For example, consumers deserve to know why the EU chooses to set legal limits for a risky substance rather than a full ban.

“It is good news that public information on how risk management decisions are reached will be improved. Yet, to ensure full transparency, what we need is for Member States’ votes to become public when it comes to decisions to ensure that food on consumers’ plate is safe².”

Today’s vote marks the end of the legislative procedure on this file.

Background:

In April 2018, the Commission [published plans](#) to update the [General Food Law](#) to require EFSA to publish the non-confidential parts of industry-funded studies that support safety evaluations of products such as pesticides, food additives or novel foods for instance.

The move [came as a response](#) to the European Citizens’ Initiative ‘Ban Glyphosate’, which saw over a million Europeans call on the EU to increase the transparency of EFSA scientific assessments. Under EU law, industry must prove its products are safe before it can put them on the market. But up until today, the studies industry pays for and submits to EFSA as part of a product authorisation request remain secret.

More:

BEUC [position](#) on the Commission’s proposal on transparency and sustainability of the EU risk assessment model in the food chain, 2018.

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² Risk management measures to authorise new food additives, novel foods, GMOs, etc. or to control food contaminants are made according to a procedure (‘Comitology’) involving a vote by the Member States.

