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EU Parliament votes to lift the veil on food safety assessments

Today, the European Parliament voted in plenary to make risk assessment in the food chain more transparent.¹

The Parliament supported making public right away the non-confidential parts of industry applications submitted to the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) for authorising food additives, pesticides or GMO. Unless there is an overriding public interest in disclosure, confidential treatment may be granted to a closed list of non-safety related information items. The onus shall be on industry to prove commercial harm if certain information is disseminated. Whilst commercial use of the data will be prohibited, its use for research purposes will be freely permitted to allow for peer scrutiny of EFSA scientific assessments.

BEUC Director General, Monique Goyens commented:

"We are glad the EU Parliament chose to stand by consumers. Public controversies around glyphosate, aspartame or bisphenol A have shaken consumer confidence in the way the EU regulates food safety. If we are to rebuild consumer trust, we must end the secrecy around the studies used by EFSA to appraise the safety of substances ending up in our food."

Yet EU lawmakers also backed some amendments which could hamper full transparency:

- The setting up of a 'Board of Appeal' for industry to contest EFSA confidentiality decisions, which will delay the publication of safety data.
- The inclusion of "innovative ideas" in the list of potential confidential items. This vague and unspecific language paves the way for abusive confidentiality claims.

BEUC Director General, Monique Goyens added:

"Today's vote sends a very positive signal. Yet, the upcoming inter-institutional talks must fix some flaws, which could otherwise water down the impact of the proposed reform.

"The 'Board of Appeal' allowing industry to contest EFSA confidentiality decisions will be an extra administrative burden for an agency whose resources are already under strain. It will also delay the release of the data.

"EU policy-makers must ensure no safety data remains hidden from the public. To do so, they should close any potential loophole in the list of information items for which EFSA might grant confidential treatment."

The report will now be referred back to the Parliament ENVI committee, who will enter into trilogue negotiations with the Council and European Commission.

Background:

In April, 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.

ENDS

1. The Parliament adopted a report amending the European Commission's [proposal](#) to revise the General Food Law.

References

- BEUC [policy position](#) on the Commission's proposal on transparency and sustainability of the EU risk assessment model in the food chain

ENDS

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