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German Government on federal funding for biotech research

Report Categories:

Biotechnology - GE Plants and Animals

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Report Highlights:

The German government recently responded to a parliamentary enquiry regarding public funding into genetically engineered crops. While there is public funding for genetically engineered crops at federal research institutions, universities and private companies, the German government is unable to present total values due to the nature of the research projects and the way information is categorized. The government's answer also shows different approaches to biotech research among ministries. The Federal Ministry of Food, Agriculture, and Consumer Protection will not fund projects for the development of genetically engineered crops and its focus is on biotech safety issues. For its part, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research promotes a more open approach to the methods used in plant research and some biotech projects are funded.

General Information:

The German government answered a parliamentary enquiry (called in German, 'Kleine Anfrage') by the Green Party about research funding for agricultural biotechnology by the Federal Government of Germany. Following is an unofficial English summary of the answer by the Federal Government of Germany published on July 22, 2013:

“Projects for the development of genetically modified crops and animals are not funded by the Federal Ministry of Food, Agriculture, and Consumer Protection. "Activities related to genetic engineering are focused on safety issues," the federal government writes in its response to questions about "of federal research funding for agricultural biotechnology" ([17/14350](#)). A detailed list and a clear and precise calculation were not possible due to the way information is categorized. Within the Ministry, there have been about 75 research or security related projects since 2005 that relate to genetically modified organisms.

The Greens had asked in a parliamentary enquiry ([17/13984](#)) about public funding in order to make an objective assessment of the advantages and disadvantages of agricultural biotechnology. According to the Green party, agricultural biotechnology in Europe has failed for the time being with the withdrawal of large German companies from the European market. Since the beginning of the commercial growing of genetically modified crops 20 years ago, critics have warned of the environmental, health, and socio-economic risks of this technology.

In its response, the federal government writes that the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) promotes as open approach to the methods used in plant research. The BMBF aims for the best possible approach, as this also a socially relevant issue. Accordingly, the funding notices are open to any technology. Projects that use genetically modified crops were to be found in various funding initiatives. Clear and precise information on the amount of funding were not possible due to the way information is categorized, writes the federal government. The BMBF promotes no projects in which genetically modified animals will be developed. Animal models would be used in health research for the development of new treatment and prevention methods. Here genetically modified animal lines would also be used. But clear and precise information on the level of support for the development of genetically modified animal lines are not possible due to the way information is categorized.”

Background information

A "Kleine Anfrage" is a question posed by a party in Parliament. It is one oversight tool used by Parliament to better understand or to highlight particular government policies. This particular parliamentary enquiry was made by members of the Green Party, which currently polling about

14 percent but is not part of the governing CSU/CDU/FDP coalition.

The Federal Government reports that it is not possible to present a precise calculations of funding for agricultural biotechnology and genetically engineered crops due to the way information is categorized and the nature of the research projects being funded. However, the anti biotech newsletter “Informationsdienst Gentechnik” states that the federal government has at least €45 million for plant biotech research since 2011. The answer by the federal government shows that BMBF funds federal research institutions, universities and private companies through the program “[plant biotechnology of the future](#)”.

[For detailed information about agricultural biotechnology policies in Germany, please GAIN report: [Germany Agricultural Biotechnology Annual 2013](#).]