



Foreign Agricultural Service

**GAIN Report**

Global Agriculture Information Network

Voluntary Report - public distribution

Date: 7/28/2000

GAIN Report #GM0027

## **Germany**

## **Biotechnology**

# **German Product Testing Foundation holds press conference on GMO test results on 82 products**

**2000**

Approved by:

**Joani Dong**

**U.S. Embassy, Berlin**

Prepared by:

Joani Dong

---

### **Report Highlights:**

**On July 27, 2000, the highly regarded German Stiftung Warentest (Product Testing Foundation) announced that it tested 82 food products for GMO content and uncovered 31 that tested positive. Though most had low levels, three had amounts that merited labeling but had not been. Press accounts were mostly negative, citing that labeling was essential to enable consumers to make informed buying decisions.**

On July 27, 2000, AgAtt attended a press conference given by the highly regarded *Stiftung Warentest* (Product Testing Foundation). This independent organization was chartered by the Bundestag, the German lower house of parliament, and is supported by government and private funding to test products, foods and services.

The press conference was particularly newsworthy because it reported on the results of testing 82 products found on supermarket shelves for GMO content and appears in an article in its August issue of *Test*, its monthly consumer magazine similar to the American *Consumer Reports*.

Foundation officials Hubertus Primus and Kirsten Koeppe announced that 31 of the 82 products tested positive for GMO ingredients. Although most had insignificant amounts, there were three products that were not labeled as containing GMO's but nonetheless had amounts at levels which require labeling (1 percent or higher).

The three products in question were the American Bisquick Shak'n Pour Original Pancake Mix (20 percent), England's Sport Go Bar Mango and Papaya (19.3 percent) and the Netherlands' Taffeta Madagascan Vanilla Luxury Non Dairy Frozen Dessert (13.4 percent). There was also a corn product that had trace amounts of Round Up Ready Corn, which is not allowed in Europe.

The tone of the conference was predictably negative. The organization stands for consumer protection and pointed to a survey done in Kiel to which most respondents stated that they would not accept GMO products even if offered for free. The foundation would like to see a tighter threshold at a level less than 1 percent. It believes that biotechnology is too young and warrants more research. It believes there are too many unanswered questions, i.e., allergy risks. It stated that German Chancellor Schroeder, who has publically announced his intention to tackle difficult biotechnology discussions, had to take all consumer concerns into consideration. (Refer to Berlin Cable 02889)

Today's newspapers reported swift reaction by supermarkets. Richelt, a high-end Berlin chain of supermarkets, reportedly pulled all products found by the foundation to have traces of GMO's. Tengelmann, a national chain of supermarkets, and the famous KaDeWe department store of Berlin pulled the three products with high GMO levels off its shelves. A sample reading of editorials from the *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, with the second highest circulation behind *Die Bild*, a sensationalist newspaper, and *Der Tagespiegel*, the popular Berlin daily, were unfavorable. Basically, they stated that although GMO amounts were low, the main point was that consumers could not trust products that should have been labeled but were not. In fact, they had been cheated. Labeling was a must to enable consumers to make truly informed buying decisions and could serve as the basis to avoid allergy problems. They questioned the hesitation to label if industry had nothing to hide and the real benefit that GMO content offered to the consumer given potential risk. Naturally, they supported a tighter threshold level. They also stated that industry could face more stringent labeling requirements as a result of its lack of transparency.

On a positive note, the *Deutschen Industrievereinigung Biotechnologie* (German Biotechnology Industry Organization) which represents about 150 biotech firms based in Germany reported in a press release on the benefits of GMO plants on the producer level and pointed to research conducted globally to assure and verify safety. It stated that it was also for labeling for products containing GMO ingredients as a way to help consumers make informed choices and accept green biotechnology.