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## **France**

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### **France Takes Tough Position on GE Crops Based on Flawed Study**

**Report Categories:**

Biotechnology - GE Plants and Animals

Agriculture in the News

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**Report Highlights:**

The toxicological impact on rats fed on herbicide-tolerant bioengineered corn study released a month ago has generated huge media coverage (at least eighty articles in the general press) and scientific outcry. Further, official European and French national agencies (including the European Food Safety Agency, France's Food Safety Agency, and the High Council on Biotechnology) have dismissed the study as inconclusive and flawed. The Government of France, however, based on the study, is asking to change and make stricter the European Union's health assessment of bioengineered products.

**General Information:**

**Media coverage remains strong:**

Since its release on September 19, a study by Seralini *et al.* published in the *Food and Chemical Toxicology* journal on the toxicological impacts on rats fed on herbicide-tolerant bioengineered corn has raised multiple and strong comments by the media and experts in France, Europe, and in the United States. (See GAIN reports [FR9119 International Scientists Respond to Uncritical Media](#), dated October 9, 2012, and FR911 Weak Science – Strong Political Position, dated September 21, 2012.) Media coverage of the study has remained strong since the weekly paper *Le Nouvel Observateur* carried the headline “Yes, GMOs Are Poison.” Since September 19, approximately 80 articles, interviews, and opposite the editorial pages have been published in France’s general press related to this study.

**Official agencies refute the study and are concerned with its societal impact:**

All the official agencies involved, including the European Food Safety Agency (EFSA), France's Food Safety Agency (ANSES), and High Council on Biotechnology (HCB), as well as Germany's and Denmark's agencies, concluded that the study was flawed and inconclusive. The opinion of EFSA (available [here](#)) concludes that, “Following a detailed statistical review and analysis by an EFSA Task Force, EFSA’s GMO Panel has concluded that this re-analysis of the data does not raise any new safety concerns.”

On October 22, 2012, HCB and ANSES released their respective reviews of the Seralini study. (The HCB’s press communiqué in English is available on [here](#), while a summary of the executive summary of the HCB’s opinion is available [here](#). ANSES’s press release and full review, all in French, are available [here](#).) Both HCB and ANSES refuted the scientific validity of the study, but asked for long-term studies assessing genetically-engineered products’ impact on health to be conducted under public funding (national and European). ANSES called for such broad-based studies and research work in order to consolidate knowledge on health risks that that not sufficiently documented, as performed in the United States under the National Toxicology Program.

HCB and ANSES reviews followed that of six scientific national Academies of France (including the Academy of Agriculture, the National Academy of Medicine, the National Academy of Pharmacy, the Academy of Science, the Academy of Technology, and the Veterinary Academy), released on October 19, 2012 (available [here](#)). While the science of the study is criticized, as in the reviews of other official agencies, the Academies also tackle the societal impact of the article, considering that “the orchestration of the reputation of a scientist or of a team is a serious misconduct when it helps to spread to the general public fears not based on any established conclusion. Consumers not having sufficient information, this results in increased fears of GMOs spread by 'catastrophic' media.” The Academies also strongly take position on the ethics of the publication of the study. “Orchestrated media coverage around work without strong conclusion poses a major ethical problem: that of the authors who have seen fit to organize a high scale communication campaign around these works, a process which appears to be motivated more by ideology than by the quality or relevance of the data obtained, and that of the journal that has agreed to publish data that appear very fragile on many aspects, if only statistics. The conditions of distribution to the press, which was unable to be informed in advance and therefore which had no opportunity to comment with full knowledge of the facts, are not acceptable.” Both the Academies and the French Association for Plant Biotechnology ([ABFV](#)) recommended reassuring the general public on the safety of NK603 corn, while consumers have been shocked by the high visibility in the media of pictures of rats affected by enormous tumors as the illustration of the Seralini

*et al.* study's results.

**Scientific journalists condemn communication around the study:**

On October 5, the European Union of Science Journalists Association (EUSJA) condemned the “outrageous abuse of the embargo system that was perpetuated (...) to manipulate the press in order to get a favorable coverage of a study on the controversial and important issue for food safety in relationship to genetically modified organisms” in a [statement](#). On October 15, their French counterpart, AJSPI, released a [declaration](#) in the same line, named “Embargo and Confidentiality.”

**Government reaction:**

On October 22, after the HCB and ANSES released their reviews, the Government of France requested to “reconsider the European Union assessment, approval and monitoring system for GMOs and pesticides,” and added that “in this perspective, the Government reaffirms its determination to maintain the moratorium on GMOs approved for cultivation in the European Union.” (See the Ministry of Agriculture press release [here](#).) The Ministry of Agriculture confirmed in the communiqué that, based on ANSES and HCB’s reviews, there is no need to question the market approvals of NK603 and roundup. It is not the first time that France has taken an adverse position towards agricultural biotechnology against scientific evidence. The national ban on Bt corn cultivation was overturned in November 2011 by the French High Administrative Authority, Conseil d’Etat, on the basis of insufficient evidence of risk to human health or the environment, based on a ruling of the European Court of Justice, and EFSA reaffirmed that there is no scientific basis to justify the French safeguard measure. The French Government re-initiated the ban via a decree in March 2012.

**Annex: A non exhaustive list of articles published in the French general press on the Seralini et al. study, by date of publication. The color code is used to differentiate the media.**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Media</b>	<b>Title</b>
23-Oct	La Tribune	OGM : une etude alarmiste réfuté... et la France continue d'ignorer le principe de précaution
23-Oct	Le Figaro	Où sont les OGM dans l'alimentation humaine?
23-Oct	Les Echos	L'étude française alarmiste sur les OGM désavouée
23-Oct	Les Echos	Descartes, réveille-toi!
22-Oct	Huffington Post	Etude sur les OGM, comment Gilles-Eric Seralini a gagné la partie
22-Oct	Le Figaro	OGM - l'autorité sanitaire réfute l'étude Seralini
22-Oct	Le Monde	Comment les tests sur les rats échouent à protéger les hommes
22-Oct	Le Monde	OGM - Les autorités scientifiques françaises critiquent les travaux de M. Seralini
22-Oct	Slate	L'expérience de GE Seralini est nulle mais pleine d'avenir
19-Oct	Le Figaro	Les académies critiquent l'étude sur l'impact des OGM
19-Oct	Le Monde	OGM - Six académies pointent les "insuffisances" de l'étude Seralini
19-Oct	Le Parisien	OGM - L'étude choc sur les rats à nouveau contestée
18-Oct	Le Nouvel Observateur	Les OGM sont des plantes pesticides : ils nous conduisent tout droit au désastre
18-Oct	Libération	OGM "Le scandale médiatique est contre-productif," Interview of the President of HCB's Socio-Economic and Ethics Committee
15-Oct	Liberation	Seralini et les OGM : une déclaration de l'AJSPI
13-Oct	Mediapart	OGM : le labo secret de Seralini
11-Oct	Le Monde	OGM : "l'affaire Seralini" examinée par les députés
11-Oct	Liberation	Neuf questions sur Seralini et les "OGM Poisons"
9-Oct	Liberation	OGM : l'autorité européenne demande à Seralini de coopérer sur son étude
8-Oct	Le Nouvel Observateur	Etudes sur les OGM : une lacune à combler sans tarder
7-Oct	Le Nouvel Observateur	OGM - L'EFSA a manqué à une déontologie élémentaire
6-Oct	Mediapart	A propos des OGM
5-Oct	Le Figaro	L'Europe invalide l'étude choc sur les OGM
5-Oct	Le Monde	L'étude sur les OGM de M. Seralini rejetée par les experts européens
5-Oct	Le Monde	OGM : la société civile contre les institutions scientifiques
5-Oct	Le Nouvel Observateur	"OGM: non, la recherche ne se tourne pas les pouces," interview of Francois Houliier, President Director General, INRA

5- Oct	Marianne	L'étude "choc" sur les OGM déclenche un tollé mondial
4- Oct	Le Figaro	Les OGM et la "tremblante de l'écologiste"
4- Oct	Le Figaro	Rats nourris aux OGM : les dessous d'une étude contestée
4- Oct	Le Monde	OGM : l'EFSA rejette en l'état l'étude Seralini
4- Oct	Les Echos	OGM : l'étude alarmante sur les rats rejetée par l'EFSA
4- Oct	Liberation	Débat OGM : du scientifique au consommateur via l'agriculteur
2- Oct	Liberation	Les tenants de la précaution jouent la peur
2- Oct	Libération	OGM, Seralini : un appel à un débat raisonné
2- Oct	Libération	Quarante chercheurs signent une tribune contre l'étude du Pr. Seralini sur les OGM
1- Oct	Le Figaro	Des idées fausses sur les causes du cancer
28- Sep	Le Monde	Ne laissons pas les experts faire leur loi
27- Sep	Le Monde	Pour un débat raisonné sur les OGM
27- Sep	Slate	OGM-Monsanto : Pourquoi le gouvernement français s'est affolé
26- Sep	Le Monde	Comment décrypter une étude scientifique
26- Sep	Les Echos	OGM : Stéphane Le Foll décidé à revoir les protocoles d'autorisation
26- Sep	Slate	How anti-GMO activists are polluting science communication - how GMO opponents are the climate skeptics of the left
25- Sep	Le Monde	OGM : les vrais et les faux arguments du Pr. Gilles-Eric Seralini
25- Sep	Le Monde	Etude OGM : le Pr. Seralini dénonce les "attaques des lobbies"
24- Sep	Le Monde	OGM : qu'a fait l'Etat?
24- Sep	Le Nouvel Observateur	OGM et herbicides : l'étude de Seralini est un bon début
24- Sep	Le Nouvel Observateur	OGM tueurs : et si le journalisme scientifique arrétait de faire dans le sensationnalisme
24- Sep	Liberation	Les rats, les OGM, et l'opération de communication
23- Sep	Le Nouvel Observateur	Etude de Seralini sur les OGM : quand va-t-on retrouver la deontologie scientifique?
23- Sep	Marianne	OGM : Les démons du maïs
22- Sep	La Tribune	Les OGM inquiètent de plus en plus les Français
22- Sep	Mediapart	OGM - une étude fait beaucoup de bruit pour presque rien
22- Sep	Slate	L'expérience de Gilles-Eric Seralini est nulle mais pleine d'avenir

21-Sep	Huffington Post	OGM : l'étude sur l'effet néfaste du maïs transgénique ne peut convaincre
21-Sep	Le Monde	L'étude qui relance la polémique sur les OGM
21-Sep	Le Monde	L'évaluation des OGM va être renforcée
21-Sep	L'Express	Auchan et Carrefour ont aidé à financer l'étude sur les OGM
21-Sep	Liberation	OGM : L'étude alarmiste sur le grill
20-Sep	20 Minutes	"Il y a une responsabilité organisée sur les OGM" - Interview of Corinne Lepage
20-Sep	La Tribune	OGM : 20 ans de controverse en Europe
20-Sep	Le Figaro	Les OGM à nouveau sur le banc des accusés
20-Sep	Le Figaro	L'étude sur les OGM fortement contestée
20-Sep	Le Monde	OGM : Gilles-Eric Seralini, un scientifique engagé et critiqué
20-Sep	Le Nouvel Observateur	OGM : Le gouvernement prend l'étude de Seralini très au sérieux
20-Sep	Le Nouvel Observateur	L'accusation de Corinne Lepage
20-Sep	Le Nouvel Observateur	Exclusif : des extraits de "Tous Cobayes!"
20-Sep	Le Nouvel Observateur	Révélation : l'étude qui change tout
20-Sep	Le Nouvel Observateur	OGM : 9 critiques et 9 réponses sur l'étude de Seralini - interview of Jean-Noël Spiroux
20-Sep	Le Parisien	Toxicité des OGM : une nouvelle étude qui "change tout"
20-Sep	Le Point	Les OGM de Monsanto en accusation
19-Sep	Le Nouvel Observateur	"Je n'ai jamais vu ça. Il faut envoyer une commission d'enquête dans le labo ou cela a été fait!" - Interview of Gérard Pascal
19-Sep	Le Nouvel Observateur	Oui, les OGM sont des poisons
19-Sep	Le Nouvel Observateur	"Inconscience? Lacheté? Collusion Criminelle?" Interview of Gilles-Eric Seralini
19-Sep	Slate	Maïs OGM Monsanto, l'étrange affolement du gouvernement français
19-Sep	Slate	Le militantisme anti-OGM est-il compatible avec la science?