

It's not rocket science

Groundsel found in packaged rocket in Germany

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Following the discovery of a single plant of groundsel in a 125 g lot of packaged rocket, the German rocket market has completely broken down. Amidst fears of food poisoning several big supermarket chains cancelled their rocket orders, according to the online version of the German news magazine *Der Spiegel*. Groundsel, a common arable weed both in central Europe and the UK, looks roughly similar to rocket leaves. Having a bitter taste, it is known to be toxic for humans as it contains chemicals that can severely damage the liver but can also affect heart and lungs.

The weed was found by a farmer in a supermarket and was sent to a university laboratory where its toxicity was confirmed. After the slump in the market many farmers expect that much of the about 600 ha of rocket grown in Germany will have to be ploughed under. Triggering an extensive discussion on food safety, the groundsel case has already been used by some officials to argue against the prohibition of certain herbicides.

Also featuring in the debate are calls for tougher food control measures for fresh packaged food. Illustrating the power of supermarkets over farmers' livelihoods the case is expected to have severe economic consequences for many German rocket growers. Incidentally, the farmer who discovered the unwanted plant is an activist promoting better control of groundsel and ragworts but regrets the effects that the find has had on his fellow growers.