



Press Release – Opinion

Ghent, Belgium – 8 March 2007

EU's biotech regulations stall agricultural improvements in developing countries

Ghent, Belgium – Different prominent scientists have expressed their concerns that Europe is damaging countries in the developing world by imposing its standards to regulate genetic modified (GM) crops. The current regulatory policy is damaging the prospects of public sector biotech to the point where most of its contributions are stalled. If this is the situation in South Africa and China, where experience in the development of GM crops and biosafety regulations are in place, what then is the hope for other developing nations that desperately need transformation towards a knowledge-based bio-economy.

An international discussion

On 20th February, at a public discussion organised by Friends of Europe, Connie Hedegaard, Danish Minister for the Environment, has expressed concern that Europe is damaging countries in the developing world by imposing its standards to regulate GM crops. Also Per Pinstrup-Andersen, Professor of Food, Nutrition and Public Policy at Cornell University, and a World Food Prize laureate commented: "This Debate is important because what we think and do in Europe affects poor people in developing countries."

As a follow up to this event, the European Action on Global Life Sciences (EAGLES) invited plant researchers from South Africa, China and Brazil to hear their views on how European regulations on GM crops influence legislators in the developing world.

Former head of unit at the European Commission, DG Research and head of unit of biotechnology at the OECD Mark F. Cantley said: "The economic and political disincentives Europe imposes on the use of new technologies for environmentally friendly agriculture makes it impossible for the developing world to develop new improved crops".

In her presentation, Professor Jennifer Thompson of University of Cape Town underlined the reality of this fact: "We are concerned about what we consider the European over-regulation and question whether this may prevent, or severely delay, the approval of plants that are desperately needed by poor Africans".

Even China, according to Professor Chen Zhangliang, President of Beijing Agricultural University, has failed to approve the commercial release of GM rice due to concerns over future exports "even though China only exports 1% of its total rice production".

Looking forward to other attitudes

Critics of GM crops can no longer base their campaigns of disinformation on arguments that biotechnology is simply a tool with which multinational corporations will subjugate unwitting farmers. Rather they should acknowledge that most, if not all innovative research in agricultural biotechnology in the developing countries is done in public research institutions working towards public goods outputs.





The EU's Environmental Council has repeatedly ignored the advice of the EU's expert advisory bodies, such as the European Food Safety Agency (EFSA), on the proven safety of GM crops. The Council repeatedly fails to implement its own laws, favouring instead state censorship rather than offering choice. This departure from rational decision-making is damaging the credibility of the regulatory system on which much of Europe's innovative and industrial capacity relies. Europe's inconsistencies on the regulation of GM crops threaten the efforts of public research to create food security in the developing world.

Note to the Editor

The Institute of Plant Biotechnology for Developing Countries (IPBO) is an initiative of Ghent University, Belgium, that is committed to building capacity in developing country agricultural programs through training, consultancy, collaborative and technology transfer services.

www.ipbo.Ugent.be

www.psb.Ugent.be

www.efb-central.org

www.pubresreg.org

For more information:

Em. Prof. Marc Van Montagu

Tel: +32 (0)9 264 87 26

Secr.: +32 (0)9 264 87 27 - +32 (0)9 264 51 70 - +32 (0)9 33 13 819

mamon@psb.Ugent.be