

Vandalising GMO fields is undemocratic, illegal and immoral.

The world is facing very daunting challenges. Over 1 billion people are malnourished, often resulting in chronic diseases and premature deaths. Agriculture burdens the environment through pesticides, fertilizers, irrigation, ploughing and conversion of natural habitats. This situation will be compounded by the further growth of the world population. By 2050 the world will have to produce 70% more food, feed, fibre and biomass on a smaller agricultural area and under the stress of climate change

Farmers will have to produce more with less impact on the environment to meet these challenges, i.e. there is an urgent need for “sustainable intensification”. Farmers need crops that give more yield per hectare, that make better use of water, that are less dependent on pesticides and fertilisers, that have enhanced nutritional value, etc.

As was already recognised in the *Earth Summit* in 1992, this immense challenge cannot be solved by conventional approaches alone, but requires the involvement of new technologies such as modern biotechnology. Molecular techniques such as genetic engineering are not miracles that will solve all problems, but they are essential tools.

Since 1992, there has therefore been an immense effort in biotechnology research, in particular in the public sector, to develop crop plants with improved resistance to insects, fungi, viruses, and bacteria; crops that are tolerant to drought, heat, saline and herbicides, crops that have enhanced nutrition, etc. This research is conducted in many research institutes all over the world.

Since 1996, over one billion hectares of genetically modified crop varieties have been grown in over 30 countries across the world by over 15 million farmers, most of which small holder farmers. The aggregated results from the use of these crops, comparing to the conventional varieties replaced, show there have been significant yield gains, equivalent to 60 million additional hectares of land, pesticide reductions of 350 million kg of active ingredient, significant reductions in fossil fuel use and also of mycotoxin contamination.

Despite these results, the genetically modified crop varieties that are available to farmers are limited to primarily soy beans, maize, cotton and rapeseed with improved insect resistance and/or herbicide tolerance.

In addition, over the last few years much of the public research effort on other crops and traits has slowed down and sometimes even come to a halt. The main reasons for this reduction in public research are the increasing regulatory hurdles and vandalising many GMO field research trials by activists.

Increasing regulatory hurdles

In addition to the socio-economic and environmental benefits experienced from the use of GM crops, the experience with 25 years of research from many thousands of field trials combined with over 15 years of commercial planting of GM crops worldwide shows that there are no verifiable reports of adverse effects of GMOs on human health or the environment. Despite this, there has not been any fine tuning of the procedures in Europe, such as simplified procedures or exemptions of GM crops that are unlikely to have an adverse impact on human health and the environment. On the contrary, the regulations seem to get more cumbersome and also bans have been installed in some European countries, all without scientific justification.

Vandalising GMO fields by activists.

Field trials are essential to biotechnological research to verify performance and safety.

Scientists accept that there are permit procedures for field trials and that there are mechanisms for appeal by third parties. However, there are increasingly cases that when safety assessments, procedures and appeals have resulted in permissions for field trials, activists vandalise the field trials, sometimes with the use of threats and violence.

Such actions are undemocratic, because they trample the democratically adopted permit procedures for field trials. Activists are not above the democratically adopted laws. It is therefore disheartening and disappointing that some politicians, including an MEP, have publicly praised such actions as signs of 'public courage'. Such criminal damage and threats made towards approved research and the persons involved, disrupts innovation and research that is designed to address the important challenges of food security and environmental protection. Actions taken to destroy research and threaten researchers should instead be seen as the illegal and immoral acts they are.

What makes this vandalism particularly painful are the false justifications presented and the unwillingness to talk with the scientists who conduct this research or with the farmers who wish to include these crops for example in their integrated pest management approaches. In fact, some activists are even prepared to disrupt meetings of farmers and scientists who do believe that GM is an important tool to combat the challenges of the future.

The organisations and public sector scientists listed below call upon those activists to abandon their destructive actions and invite them to have instead an open, civilised debate, to discuss with each other the reasons for the development of specific GMOs, the wish of farmers to have the freedom of choice to grow the crops they believe fit best in their farm management systems, the concerns of the activists about specific GMOs and/or GMOs in general, and the consequences of not applying modern biotechnology. People interested in holding such a debate are invited to send their interest to: info@pubresreg.org.

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6 September 2011, Uplingen, Germany