

Wetteren GMO-controversy continues:

Ghent University organises workshop on "risk communication" teaching young scientists how to sell GMO to the public

A few months after the big potato swap in Wetteren (May 29th, 2011), Ghent University organises a symposium to train young scientists how to get GMOs accepted by the public. To present the public's critical opinion about agricultural GMOs in a limited and partial "risks communication" perspective is in itself highly debatable. Furthermore, various speakers (including some of the persons involved in the GMO potato field in Wetteren) are member of a lobby group (PRRI) that pretends to represent 'public scientists' but in reality is funded by industry and defends industry interests in international biosafety negotiations. Is it appropriate for a public research institution to promote industrial interests?

The context

It is clear that even after more than 15 years since its introduction in agriculture, GMOs face a hard time in public acceptance; be it as food, solutions to world hunger or climate change. There are good reasons for this. The widespread resistance against GMOs makes it indeed key for biotech industry allies to find new ways to 'communicate' supposed benefits of GM crops to the public.

Gent University organises a workshop on "Science and risk communication on GM crops" on 2011, December 8th as part of this effort. The participants, who pay an 80 euro entrance fee, will amongst other things get training on how to communicate complex scientific questions to a lay audience, including *"how to handle controversy among the public and answer difficult questions"*.

As the *save our science*-picture on the program indicates, the workshop is related to the heated debate around the Wetteren GM potato field trial, and the truly difficult questions this has raised for its initiators. The field trial organised by a consortium

including Ghent University, has been communicated as if it was a “scientific experiment”, yet “BASF and Wageningen University propaganda field to increase public acceptance of GM crops” may have been a more appropriate way to describe the experiment. After a large group of potato-swappers partially destroyed the field trial, a huge public debate on research directions and the role of public science in a context of close cooperation with the private sector, sparked in Belgium. This symposium is at the heart of these three issues.

Several of the invited speakers are notorious for their strong positions in promoting GMOs. IBPO Center of Ghent University, which has openly supported the development of agricultural GMOs, particularly for Southern countries, organises the meeting. The first online announcement for the workshop was co-signed by a particular biotech lobbygroup, “Public Research Regulation Initiative” (PRRI), that claims to represent “public sector scientists who conduct research in modern biotechnology for the public good”. But one month later the name of this group had disappeared.

Three members of this lobbygroup are speakers at the workshop: Marc van Montagu, Klaus Amman and Godelieve Gheysen. René Custers, communication manager of the Flemish Institute for Biotechnology (VIB) that is part of the consortium responsible for the Wetteren GM potato field, is also member of PRRI.

PRRI’s aims are also to promote public research into genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and, in particular, to counter the *“misconception” that GM crops are “the exclusive domain of a handful of big, western multinationals.”* But PRRI has not been very succesfull in creating a ‘public interest’ image, simply because it does not correspond with reality.

Since its establishment in 2004, PRRI has received considerable funding from biotech corporations. PRRI funders include: CropLife International, the US Grain Council, Monsanto, Arborgen, the Syngenta Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation. According to the PRRI website, around 270 “public sector scientists and others” have signed up to the initiative. But many PRRI members have strong direct links with the biotech industry.¹

¹ See also: <http://www.corporateeurope.org/publications/prri-are-these-public-researchers>

A workshop to promote GMOs in agriculture

Beyond being the usual trojan horses of multinational corporations interests, the premises and assumptions which frame this day are debatable in themselves. Discussions will indeed be about the general public's reluctance toward vegetal transgenesis, but the perspective chosen for the discussion is highly problematic: questions raised by controversies about GMOs go way beyond the mere issue of "risks". As a consequence, "communication" and pedagogy techniques will not be, and cannot be, the solution. The organisers of this symposium pretend to be discussing risks related to genetically modified plants, but in fact what will be discussed, are promotion techniques for agricultural GMOs. A few of the symposiums premises and assumptions are discussed below. We question the role of public research in the potato-file, and the submission of public research to industrial interests through obscure lobbying activities.

Risk communication. According to another "scientific" biotech lobbygroup with offices in Brussels, the International Life Sciences Institute (ILSI), an organisation promoting the interests of global agribusiness corporations in scientific debates: *"if public opinion differs from scientific risk assessment, a focus on real results would give priority to the latter, aided by careful risk communication. (...) New hazards should be subject to risk assessment before these are treated as risks. It should be explained to consumers that there is no such thing as 'zero risk'. A vocabulary should be developed to express risk in relative terms, in order to e.g. compare the risks of particular new technologies to everyday risks. The increased sensitivity of analytical methods is expected to continue to identify hazards, which will need good risk communication to prevent scare stories and inappropriate consumer behaviour, like avoidance of fruit and vegetables due to very low traces of contaminants."* The bottom line theory under the idea of 'risk communication' seems to be that if there are doubts, risk communication is used to create certainty or say that 'we live with risks all the time'. And if there are certain negative impacts (such as increased use of pesticides), communication tactics can be used to sow doubt about them. A gross manipulation is to use the comparison between risks associated with new technologies and everyday risks, which hides the fact that risks associated with new technologies are **additional risks** to everyday risks. But chances are the most crucial question of them all will not be discussed during this workshop: if there is a risk, who bears the cost of the evidence? Industry, or society? Should we allow industry to use our environment and societies as guinea pigs, or should we demand that industry bears the cost of

all risk assessments until the absence of risk, or a level of risk transparently acceptable to society, is proven?

Hiding in the ivory tower. Several interested people, beyond the usual question owners, inquired to get access to the seminar, specifying their incapacity to pay the entrance fee, yet saw their requests refused. It seems that the organisers of the seminar prefer to hide in an ivory tower, picturing themselves as heroes victoriously resisting the assault of illiterate barbarians questioning the virtues of their projects.

Defining lay people as irrational and backwarded. It is common that “those who know” agree on the necessity to convert “the other”. Knowing scientists, on the basis of expert sciences, convert “the ignorants”. An attitude which is surely reassuring for scientists, but which is, among others, a reason of the existence of a wide gap between the problem and its audience.

Reduction of a public controversy into its technical dimension. If the question is “*how to handle controversy among the public and answer difficult questions*”, it is useless to try doing this by approaching the problem from a “risk”-perspective. One could question what is understood under “impacts of risk”, or even wonder what the “risks of the impacts” are. As such, the public expression of reluctance towards GMOS has as much to do with socio-economic impacts, impact on the future of agriculture, on the changing relationships with food... In summary, people which have gathered around the GMO question are concerned to remain in control about their lives and futures. Entering in dialogue with these persons will surely not work when reducing the complexity of the issue to its technical dimension. On the contrary, the question is how to open up the approach, how to take different dimensions and their interactions into account.

Reducing debate to “communication”. If one seeks to solve a societal problem through its reduction into an issue of extent, means and/or content of communication of projects, failure is assured. The question of how to engage in public debate is definitely an interesting one. Acknowledging the other as a recognized and equal spokesperson is a first prerequisite. Yet communication, as understood in the workshop, seems to start from a top-down perspective and asymmetric power relations, and results in the reproduction of a classic stage where “those who know” encounter “those who ignore”.

Incantatory evocation of the transgemythic struggle against hunger. Just as one example; the existing gap will only deepen with every incantatory evocation of the transgemythic struggle against hunger to justify the need to further develop vegetal transgenics. But this is exactly what we fear when looking at the partners and invited speakers of the day... Besides, when actors proclaim their scientific authority to advance this type of socio-economic considerations to valid GMO development in science, we are already confronted with forms of usurpation. Moreover, it is interesting to observe how these justifying arguments change with the wind of the public debate. If GMOs at one point were supposed to fight hunger, at another moment they seem to be "the" solution to stop the decline of biodiversity. When biofuels were falsely put forward as the solution for replacing declining fossil fuels, GMOs were put forward as particularly suitable for growing the fuel crops. Lately, it seems as if we need GMOs to guard ourselves against climate change.

Democratic field trial?

Taking into account these ideas it makes sense to reflect back on what happened in Wetteren. Just after the big potato swap, PRRI published a letter calling direct actions against GMO fields *"undemocratic, illegal and immoral"*. PRRI: *"It is [...] disheartening and disappointing that some politicians, including an MEP, have publicly praised such actions as signs of 'public courage'." [...] "Actions taken to destroy research and threaten researchers should instead be seen as the illegal and immoral acts they are."* But was it really so democratic to conduct this 'field trial' that clearly did not serve any scientific purpose in an environment where so many are opposed? And if PRRI likes democracy so dearly, how come they opposed changes in and international convention (the Aarhus Convention) that would give the public greater rights to participate in decision-making on GMOs? How moral is it for universities to spend public research money on a potato that in the end will make fat corporations like BASF richer? Is it really the role of universities to organise seminars that aim at the promotion of GMOs in agriculture? Is it the task of public researchers to invest their time in something that in the best case could be seen as a promotional act, in the worst case as pure and simple manipulation? Doctoral students surely have better things to learn!

Sébastien Denys (Field liberation movement - FLM)

Nina Holland (Corporate Europe Observatory - CEO)

Cartography:

- ¥ **Annexe 1: Marc Van Montagu: Le baronnet de la Transgenic Valley flamande.** Plusieurs invités de marques sont annoncés dont certains sont connus pour leurs prises de positions fanatiquement favorables aux OGM, comme le professeur Van Montagu dont vous trouverez une présentation ci-dessous.
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- ¥ **Annexe 2: L'IBPO et la coopération aux développements de la transgénèse.** Ce séminaire est organisé par le groupe de recherche IBPO qui ne cache pas son rôle dans la diffusion des plantes génétiquement modifiées à destination des pays du Sud.
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- ¥ **Annexe 3: PRRI: public scientist for corporate interests.** Il est organisé avec le soutien actif du PRRI un groupe de pression dédiée à la promotion des OGM.

Annexe 1: Marc Van Montagu: Le baronnet de la Transgenic Valley flamande

La Belgique a toujours eu un rôle moteur dans le développement des biotechnologies. Le professeur Fiers fait partie des pionniers. En 1972, il est le premier à déterminer la séquence ADN d'un gène complet. Quelques années plus tard, il dévoile le code de l'ADN d'un génome complet. Ces recherches l'orientent vers le domaine médical.

Marc Van Montagu, jeune doctorant à l'université de Gand, fera le parcours en sens inverse, et réinvestit l'agronomie depuis la génétique. Devenu professeur, il joue un rôle déterminant dans le déploiement de ces techniques en agriculture. Il décrit son propre parcours : « *nous nous sommes tournés, Joseph Schell et moi-même, vers la microbiologie des plantes au début des années septante. Nous cherchions alors un remède à une maladie végétale provoquée par une bactérie, l' *agrobacterium tumefaciens*.* » Ils s'aperçoivent que l' « *agrobacterium tumefaciens* modifiait le patrimoine génétique du plant [...] pour lui faire produire des substances nécessaires à la bactérie elle-même » et songent à utiliser cette bactérie comme vecteur afin de doter les plantes de propriétés inédites, « *en d'autres termes, la bactérie pratiquait le génie génétique.* » Ils mettent au point l'une des trois techniques disponibles pour « fabriquer » une plante génétiquement modifiée. Leur technique d'insertion est utilisée aujourd'hui par tout le secteur.

En 1984, Van Montagu et son collègue J. Schell sont les premiers à façonner un tabac transgénique, et ce qui est plus déterminant, à obtenir l'expression du gène étranger dans le végétal. En 1986, toujours en Belgique, un « prototype » est testé en plein air sur un tabac, une autre première mondiale. Van Montagu se raconte en ces termes : « *He developed plant molecular genetics, in particular molecular mechanisms for cell proliferation and differentiation and response to abiotic stresses (high light, ozone, cold, salt and drought) and constructed transgenic crops (tobacco, rape seed, corn) resistant to insect pest and tolerant to novel herbicides. His work with poplar trees resulted in engineering of trees with improved pulping qualities.* »

Pour son travail pionnier, « *he has received numerous outstanding awards [...], including the prestigious "Japan Prize". He is foreign associate of the National Academy of Science (USA) since 1986 and the Agricultural Academy of Russia and France. He holds 6 Doctor Honoris Causa degrees. In 1990 he was granted the title of "Baron" by Baudouin I, King of the Belgians.* »

Aurolé de son incontestable réussite scientifique puis académique, il ne pouvait pas ne pas prendre sa part dans la « valorisation des résultats de la recherche », les

chercheurs étant désormais évalués à l'aune de leur capacité à faire valoir l'intérêt de leurs recherches auprès des opérateurs privés et à capter leurs capitaux. Pour trouver les financements nécessaires au développement de ses techniques, il se tourne vers des investissements privés. Il fonde la « start-up » *Plant Genetic System Inc.* (PGS). S'il la revend en 1996 à AgrEvo, il en reste néanmoins directeur scientifique et membre du bureau de direction.

Lorsqu'on l'interroge sur la possibilité de rester « *dans le giron de l'université* », sa réponse est une bonne illustration de ses conceptions opératoires : « *Dans le monde académique, on étudie les grands principes, c'est ce qu'on appelle la recherche fondamentale. Dans notre cas, [il s'agissait d'] essayer de découvrir le morceau du code génétique qui permettrait de développer telle ou telle propriété intéressante.* » Il pense que ce développement est « *affaire de managers qui n'ont pas leur place dans le monde académique. A chacun sa spécialité.* » Ce qui est pour le moins paradoxal de sa part.

Le crédo de Van Montagu est que grâce au génie génétique la pollution sera endiguée et que les plantes génétiquement modifiées apporteront une solution à la famine et à la surpopulation. Il est l'une des chevilles ouvrières du transgémithique combat contre la « *faim dans le monde* ». Pour donner consistance à son projet, il met sur pied en 1999 l'*Instituut voor Planten Biotechnologie Ontwikkelingslanden* (IPBO) qui finance des doctorants et des chercheurs du « *Sud* ». Il est aussi l'un des instigateurs de la « *plate-forme technologique* » *Flanders Interuniversity Institutes for Biotechnology* (VIB) dont il est directeur scientifique du département de génétique. Son dernier bébé est une start-up nommée *Crop Design*.

En avril 1998, dans un long entretien, il « *dresse le bilan provisoire d'une science riche de mille promesses.* » Les législations en vigueur sont trop contraignantes, un frein « *déraisonnable et inutile* » à la recherche. Cet entretien se passe au moment même où l'« *éclosion harmonieuse* » de la biologie moléculaire « *est freinée par des attitudes irrationnelles* », selon ses propres dires. « *Les Verts scient la branche sur laquelle ils sont assis, car la seule véritable solution à la pollution chimique, notamment dans l'agriculture, passe par les plantes transgéniques.* »

Au faite de sa gloire, il ne semble pas prendre l'exacte mesure de ce qui est en train de se produire. C'est pourtant lui que Philippe Busquin nomme vice-président du *European Group on Life Sciences* chargé d'éclairer la Commission sur les OGM (Axel Kahn en est le président.) Bref, Van Montagu accumule les fonctions et les confusions d'intérêts. Si la Belgique est le berceau du projet transgénique dans l'agriculture, nous avons trouvé son géniteur.

Annexe 2: L'IBPO et la coopération aux développements de la transgénèse

INIBAP

En 2001, quelques mois après l'entrée en fonction du nouveau Secrétaire d'état à la Coopération au développement, Eddy Boutmans (Agalev), une demande de financement pour une conférence introduite par l'INIBAP (International Network for the Improvement of the Banana and Plantain) attire son attention. De quoi s'agit-il? Ce projet 100 % public (qui n'intéresse pas l'industrie), étudie, dissèque et collectionne les bananes. L'origine de ce réseau de laboratoires est la prolifération, au milieu des années 80, d'un « nuisible destructeur » : une maladie fongique du bananier (la cercosporiose noire ou Black Sigatoka). Les « bananas and plantains are thus of major importance to food security,[...] (they) are the developing world's fourth most important food crop, after rice, wheat and maize. » L'INIBAP établit le centre de transit de sa collection internationale de matériel génétique de l'espèce de banane Musa à la K.U. de Leuven, où le matériel est conservé in vitro. S'il est bien prévu que ces collaborateurs établissent leurs propres collections « locales », « the world's largest collection of banana and plantain germplasm, held by INIBAP in trust for the international community, is also located at KUL. » L'INIBAP a déjà récolté près de 400 millions de francs belges depuis sa fondation. « Belgium, already recognised as a world leader in banana research, was one of the foremost sponsors of INIBAP at this time »

En suggérant que « World Food Day, Octobre 16, would be an appropriate time to do this [la conference], » le directeur de cet institut, M. Frison, semble parfaitement conscient de son rôle de faire valoir. Les partisans des biotechnologies brandissent ce projet comme une justification de leurs intentions bienveillantes.

Effectivement, en 2001, il est uniquement question de préservation de la biodiversité. Nulle part n'apparaît l'intention de développer des variétés génétiquement modifiées. Ce ne sera que deux ans plus tard que Frison abat ces cartes dans un article où il met en scène la disparition de la banane, tout en s'accordant le statut du divin sauveur. La solution est bien entendu de les « immuniser » contre ces nuisances : de les transformer en usines à pesticides et de les rendre tolérantes à un herbicide.

CGIAR

A l'époque, ces collections de bananes se présentent en fait en éclaircissement d'un enjeu

d'une toute autre importance: le financement belge aux Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), qui ne tarde pas à être sur la table. L'INIBAP est partie prenante dans cette organisation, qui coordonne la recherche agricole internationale à des fins de développement. La contribution belge aux CGIAR doit être renouvelée. . Le Conseil Fédéral de Développement Durable (CFDD) a déjà été amené à se prononcer par le passé sur l'efficacité de la contribution belge aux CGIAR. Celle-ci fût jugée déplorable. Pourtant, à l'époque, « la contribution (...)au CGIAR s'élève à 220,5 millions de BEF/an, ce qui représente 34 % des contributions aux organisations agricoles ou alimentaires internationales (654 millions, CGIAR compris), ou encore 1,25 % de l'aide AGCD totale »

Selon la Plate-forme Souveraineté Alimentaire (PSA), « le CGIAR joue un rôle majeur en matière de promotion de l'utilisation des biotechnologies et des OGM pour les pays en développement, alors même que les liens qui unissent le CGIAR à l'industrie "du vivant" sont pour le moins ambigus. » Cette association déplore que « malgré [...] une contribution financière de la DGCI aux CGIAR supérieure à 250 millions de BEF par an, aucun débat n'a été organisé à la DGCI sur les orientations de la recherche agricole internationale. En particulier, l'utilisation des biotechnologies et des OGM en agriculture n'a pas été débattue, alors que les projets mettant en oeuvre ces technologies reçoivent une part importante du budget belge accordé aux CGIAR. » Et « il apparaît que la contribution au CGIAR est peu équilibrée. Ainsi pratiquement aucun programme de recherche n'est financé sur les thèmes comme l'agrobiologie, les études systèmes, les études d'impacts, la gestion des ressources naturelles, les études socio-économiques (dont les études sur la réforme agraire, le développement institutionnel des organisations paysannes, etc.) Des thèmes de recherches qui rencontrent pourtant les priorités émises par les ONG et les organisations paysannes du Sud. »

IBPO

Une autre initiative revient à Van Montagu. « As early as in 1983, after obtaining the first transformed plant, it became evident that a new technique had arisen which could have a great impact in the third world. Since then, the Department of Genetics started to establish contacts and collaborations with the third world laboratories, especially in Asia and Latin-America. » En 1998, Van Montagu avance que « les pays occidentaux devraient créer d'urgence des instituts de recherche centrés sur les besoins du Tiers Monde dans la sphère des biotechnologies. » Ce qui fut fait avec la création de l'IPBO. Cet organisme est destiné à promouvoir les biotechnologies dans les périphéries. Ses quatre responsables sont employés par Aventis et la page de

garde du site (hébergée par la RUG, Rijksuniversiteit Gent) était ornée du logo de la même société. Certains projets sont menés en collaboration avec le CGIAR. L'IBPO forme des chercheurs, finance des doctorats et des recherches, organise des échanges scientifiques avec les pays du Sud, envoie des chercheurs participer à la construction de laboratoire, et organise des formations pratiques et théoriques dans les pays en développements. Les sources de financements sont multiples, y participent notamment : l'INCO-DC (fond européen de développement), Belgian Administration for Development Cooperation (BADC-ABOS), Flemish Interuniversity Council (VLIR), Institutional University Coopération, Rockefeller individual grant, le Flemish Ministry of Education, Bilateral scientific and technological coopération, Flemish ministry of Education: Scholarships/Bursaries, Bijzonder onderzoeksproject (BOF 2001) et l'UNESCO.

Des organisations comme les centres internationaux de recherche agricole (CGIAR), l'INIBAP ou l'IPBO reçoivent des sommes publiques considérables qui aboutissent, par l'entremise des centres de recherches universitaire, dans l'escarcelle des grands du secteur privé. C'est aux laboratoires publics de recherche agronomique à destination des pays du Sud que l'on doit les bananes-vaccins ou le riz doré. Cette instrumentalisation de la misère est parfaitement démagogique. L'absence de réponse des principaux concernés laisse le champ libre à cette forme de propagande et de captation de financements publics qui fonctionnent redoutablement bien. En effet, le transgémithique combat contre la faim dans le monde n'est pas seulement une évocation incantatoire dans une perspective propagandiste, plus pragmatiquement, il permet aussi de capter une partie significative des fonds destinés à aider le dit tiers-monde.

Annexe 3: PRRI: public scientist for corporate interests

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What is behind PRRI?

PRRI’s aims are also to promote public research into genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and, in particular, to counter the “misconception” that GM crops are “the exclusive domain of a handful of big, western multinationals.” But PRRI has not been very succesfull in creating a ‘public interest’ image, simply because it does not correspond with reality.

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Marc Van Montagu is the PRRI chairman, who founded the biotech companies Plant Genetic Systems Inc. and CropDesign. He is also president of the European Federation of Biotechnology (EFB), which includes both universities and private company members like Monsanto. PRRI founder and honorary member Willy de Greef, for example is a former Syngenta employee, and in 2008 was appointed Secretary General of EuropaBio, the lobby association for the biotech industry in Brussels.

Leading members of the PRRI lobbying team at UN conventions include former Monsanto research director, Gerard Barry, and Piet van der Meer, a former Dutch government official but with a strong industry bias. PRRI member Roger Beachy is a founding president of the Monsanto funded Danforth Center, which both sponsor PRRI.

Piet van der Meer played a key role in setting up PRRI and is still involved as a consultant. He is a Dutch former Environment Ministry official, who was involved in negotiating the UN Biosafety Protocol, but his impartiality was put at question. When he gave workshops on biosafety regulations to officials from various African countries, he was again accused of industry bias, and finally quit. His wife, Laura Reifschneider, was a lobbyist for the US biotech lobby industry at the same UN negotiations.

Another PRRI member, Steven Strauss, is director of the Tree Biosafety and Genomics Research Cooperative (TBGRC – previously known as TGERC) at Oregon State University and is a well-known advocate of the commercial benefits of genetically engineered trees.

PRRI lobbying at international UN negotiations aimed to counteract any potential action taken by the UN that could hinder the adoption of GM crops, for example mandatory liability measures based on the polluter pays principle. PRRI also targeted any action taken against genetic technologies such as “Terminator” seeds and genetically modified trees.

At the EU level, PRRI strongly argues that legislation to authorise GM crops should be simplified, and that GM crops “that are unlikely to have an adverse impact on human health and the environment” should be exempted from those procedures altogether. They say that in the EU “.. the regulations seem to get more cumbersome and also bans have been installed in some European countries, all without scientific justification.”

The EU even sponsored PRRI’s lobbying work. For the period 2006-2009, PRRI received an 800.000 euro EU subsidy for the “Science4BioReg” project. This project was to promote “global involvement of public research scientists in regulations of Biosafety and Agricultural Biotechnology”. In other words, public funding ended up going to private interest lobbying for GMOs.

PRRI as “NGO defending science” at EFSA meeting

EFSA, the European Food Safety Authority, is responsible for giving the EU scientific advice on the safety of GMOs, pesticides etc. Risk communication is also one of its key tasks. EFSA is also represented on the speakers list of the workshop in Gent. But EFSA’s management and expert panels, including the GMO panel, have been severely criticised for conflicts of interest.

At the last meeting of EFSA staff with NGOs to discuss GMO issue on 29 November, PRRI was present by the persons of Klaus Amman, who presented PRRI as “an NGO

that defends science”, and Piero Morandini. But as Claire Robinson of Earth Open Source, who attended the meeting as a representative of EEB (European Environmental Bureau) observed, Amman and Morandini were actually arguing against the view put forward by EEB that there should be more scientific rigour in GMO risk assessments.

PRRI statement, 6 September 2011, Uplingen, Germany

Vandalising GMO fields is undemocratic, illegal and immoral.

Text from the letter: http://www.pubresreg.org/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_download&gid=607

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.

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.
