

May 2009

Editorial

It would be futile to complain about the European Union if we do not take the time to vote. The Parliament's role will increase in the coming years, it is therefore even more important to send competent people who are able to put solutions in place, because if that is not the case, we would only have our tears to regret what was not done.

The European institution has somehow acquired more and more power to develop the convergence between the various Member States. Like the Euro, which has saved many of our economies from the disaster in these last months. Lets be aware that the European project has been developed by the founding fathers to stabilize our continent and ensure the well being of our people, and is not simply a way to satisfy a collection of special interests in the short term. The European project is not especially easy to read, because it is baled between hard pragmatism of some, and a visionary approach. It requires the courage of those willing to take risks. But do you believe that if during the creation of the coal and steel community, the leaders at that time had validated its establishment by referendum the Germans or French, at the end of the war, would have voted yes?

It is characteristic of a democracy to host contradictory visions. It is fortunate that the Eurosceptics and the interests of our citizens enrich the debate today, because the best solutions are born from debate. But it would be illogical not to express their views through the institutions that are offered.

Thierry de l'ESCAILLE

Interview with Prof. Marc van MONTAGU: the Discovery



In the sixties, with my two colleagues, Walter FIERS and Jeff SCHELL, we were active in fundamental research at the Gent University on bacteria making tumours on plants. At the time, DNA and RNA were studied too, and that brings an essential progress for all molecular biology, especially on agrobacterium.

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It was nicer to work with plants than animals, and very important for a starting scientist, cheaper. We decided with Jeff SCHELL to join our two laboratories and work together to be more efficient. Our goal was to study bacteria viruses and restrictions. Extra-chromosomal properties and plasmid looks very simple, but what we wanted was to understand the mechanism of reintroducing the plasmid after its removal. The publication of the so-called Siberian method (discovered by a Russian scientist), and research results from Australia and United States helps us to move forward. The big challenge of that time was to share the information in a reasonable amount of time, as there was no such tool as Google...

As an experience could take between 5-6 years without being concluding, it was also essential to be part of the "right" network, being "in a good place in a good moment". Off course, competition was always present, but it was less direct, and we were having more freedom in exchanging the information.

The seventies saw cloning becoming a possibility, and gave me the opportunity to assist in some experiments in the US using unique techniques, before the official results were published. This allowed to better understand the mechanisms of the bacteria's "forcing" the plant to make new compounds, to be used only by this agrobacterium, conquering an "ecological niche". Agrobacterium was doing a "genetic engineering" of the plant. Adding to this discovery the crucial role of soil, being a "living" tissue, we focused our research on application which would be useful for humans. This was not an easy task, especially one trying to discredit the path we were following. Finally, the results of our research proved that we were right, and we presented our finding to the Flemish Ministry of Education. To apply the discovery we just made, I became the scientist director of the "Plant

Genetic System" enterprise. As the University did not have an accurate legal status to found a company. This is how the bridge between science and business was made.

Application on the field

Bacteria are part of nature. Therefore we deepened our research, to analyse and collect a well known *Bacillus thuringiensis* agrobacterium. Applying our method, we created the 1st transgenic plant, protecting them from targeted insects' pests. All the work done during next 10 years were an enormous step forward, which allowed us the present our results. After insect resistance, our goal became weed resisting (using only glyphosate in the future will be problematic) and male sterile plants.

Today, GMO's are offering a large scope of uses, not only for food, such as: for chemical industry, where still more than 65% of products is carbon based; for biofuels; as we will need more and more energy; for forestry; as we will need fast growing trees for construction or CO₂ fixation; for agriculture non-food products, with less waste of water and better yields.

Innovation versus Scepticism

It was naïve from our part, to believe that the society will understand and follow our discovery without any questions. It only proves that scientist don't understand how society functions. On the other hand it should be the authorities' job to explain all those issues. But we have to keep in mind that to threat people was always a good business, especially when you are doing this in the name of "saving the planet". The denomination of "Frankenstein food" created by media was a total misunderstanding. This is not an irreversible situation, but we need to explain and communicate more, from scientist, public and industry side. However society has to also accept its responsibility. If we want to evolve, we need innovation, meaning the balance

between science and economic drivers. We can't from one side forbid all the chemicals and from other not allow the application of GMO's. How we will feed the world? Who will take the responsibility for growing prices and not a sufficient supply of food?

Answering the question on biotechnology and the "non-return" point, it is crucial to underline that all our actions are irreversible, especially in the agriculture case. Simply, GMO's will do it in harmony with nature, as gene engineering is as crossing, one of the most natural acts of nature. The twenties prove that there is no "pure race", and that nothing is static. The world is changing and so is nature; it is nothing to be afraid of. Better understandings of the concept of evolution show that it is a permanent change, to overcome stressful situations. Fusion between organisms is natural, it was the case several times in the past, one sees periods of stress when genomes was doubling or even tripling. Diversity is born due to the exchange of information.

What make sense is a "precautionary approach" and not the principle of precaution. This expression, used for over fishing situation, was hijacked by certain organisation. What would we think about "Green Revolution" and Norman BORLAUG (Peace Noble Price from 1970), who radiating seeds to make mutants and resulted to obtain wheat and corn to double the yield, saving India from famine in the sixties? This action would be certainly against the precautionary principle. Today we have so many tests, that there is no argument about any danger. Even worse, we have so many of them that finally more research and innovation is becoming too expensive and too complicated. In fine instead of having SME involved in those kinds of projects, we have almost a monopole situation on the market.

Off course, all that is not easy to communicate, but we have to do it.

Food and Environmental Security

We can solve this challenge with the tools we have now. But truly this is not a European problem. In Western world we have subsidies, CAP – the structure is fine. We have to face the reality that the challenge is the developing countries, such as in Africa. We have to bring there more investments, a knowledge based economy, economic development and innovation. This policy undertake by President BARROSO has to be strengthened. We have to attract "minds" from neighbouring countries, and work with them to find regional solutions. Food aid is not a long term solution. How can we forbid them to do what we are doing ourselves? How can we justify that they are not allowed to have the same standards of life as us? The future terrorism will be linked to food scarcity if we don't change our point of view.

Moreover, the history of man kind has proven that a rising income is the best way of controlling the growth of population. "Life security" stops also the massive migration to cities. And this population control is the only way of saving biodiversity. Protecting biodiversity and natural resources is urgent. We still have so many things to learn, thousand of compounds to study, as in medicine where most of the drugs are coming from plants.

Using more transgenic plants demands less land, as we could even triple the yield, to 20ton of corn per hectare- and we could also grow it rapidly. For biodiversity it would be certainly better to re-forested and use land in the most efficient way.

In conclusion, I can only underline once more that our future is innovation and knowledge based economy. Universities are here to create knowledge; business and industry to apply it. Other, as US, China, Brazil or India has understood that perfectly. We need also champions in communication, as there is a gap in communicating on GMO's.

For example they give the opportunity to adapt to regional needs, avoiding unnecessary transport or pollution. In Europe we don't have enough land to waste it. Our future is also linked to developing countries, and this is certainly not new colonialism.

People have to use there intelligence, I believe that this will help us to better understand GMO's and other human discoveries.

■ Emmanuelle MIKOSZ
Jethro SCHIANSKY

The Interview with Professor took place in April this year, at the Laboratory of Science at Ghent University. The titles are added by the Redaction.

Professor Marc van MONTAGU, born in 1933 in Ghent is a Belgian molecular biologist. He is an Emerituous Professor and director of the Laboratory of Genetics at the faculty of Sciences at Ghent University (Belgium) and scientific director of the Genetics Department of the Flanders Interuniversity Institute for Biotechnology (VIB). Together with his colleague Prof. Jeff SCHELL, he discovered the gene transfer mechanism between Agrobacterium and plants, creating transgenic plants. He is actually President of IPBO -European Federation of Biotechnology, and NGO working with developing countries <http://www.ugent.be/we/genetics/ipbo/en>

EUROPEAN HISTORIC HOUSES (UEHHA)

The contribution of our heritage to energy saving

Ghislain d'URSEL, the chairman of UEHHA, participated in the Sustainable Energy Week in Brussels from 9 to 13 February. The RICS (Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors) organized a conference on the 'contribution of our heritage to saving energy'. The event demonstrated the importance of promoting energy efficiency in the area of conservation and renovation of historical houses. Mr Ghislain d'URSEL stated that the 'reduction of CO₂ emissions from buildings in general and more specifically from existing buildings is one of the greatest challenges we face in the 21st century'. He took part in the debate explaining the remaining difficulties and obstacles in adapting our historic heritage to the demands of energy saving.

Insisting on the importance of sustainability in conservation, the Duke of Gloucester, honorary member of RICS, pointed out that historic houses are usually in city centres. He also underlined the cultural and social significance of ancient houses which represent continuity, identity, diversity and the potential for regeneration. Max CROFTS, vice-chairman of RICS, described the organisation's activities in more detail. In particular he highlighted the role of the 'RICS Building Conservation Forum'. Launched in 1992 for people working in conservation, this forum ensures that any expert approved in matters of conservation has been properly trained and has the required experience in this area.

Karl KELLENER of the Directorate General on Energy and Transport of the European Commission, confirmed the importance of the building sector for the European Commission. In most of the European Union's member states buildings which are part of national heritage are exempt from the measures imposed by the directive on the energy performance of buildings. Karl KELLENER explained that the directive on the energy performance of buildings should be clarified and improved to ensure better application in the leg-

islation of the member states. This was highly significant, in particular when he called for attention to be paid to the differences in practical application of the directive, and when he recognized that the quality of inspections should be increased and sanctions introduced in the event of failure to comply.

The first half of the conference was about the value of historic homes from the cultural, social, economic and environmental points of view. We were particularly interested in Derek WORTHING's presentation, co-director of the Study Centre on Sustainable Buildings at the University of the West of England. He underlined the main concepts underlying sustainability which include economic, social and environmental values - intergenerational obligations, social justice, quality of life and the participation of citizens. He also drew a link between conservation and sustainability and identified four essential relationships between these two ideas. They involve minimum intervention, reversibility, enhancing effective maintenance and the precautionary principle. He explained that 'the environment is part of a building's story'. Ghislain d'URSEL talked at length about the difficulties inherent in the structure of historic buildings which can hamper the

process of adapting them to save energy. He in particular mentioned the lack of qualified staff, of available materials and also legislative and financial constraints. He pointed out that VAT reduction can act as an incentive. It can attract labour and investment into an area. The historic homes economy suffers from a dire lack of skills. It is vital to step up training and research to improve the performance of the materials used and create a wider pool of scientific data. As Stephen L. BONIFACE illustrated, the nature of the building must be understood. At present there is a clear lack of research into modern materials and the impact of new techniques on old buildings.

The conference's second round table focused on a series of case studies of best practice throughout Europe and beyond, illustrating the way in which the visibility of heritage buildings can provide energy efficiency solutions when they are renovated. Nigel BLADES, a National Trust advisor on preventive conservation, described three important stages in the adaptation of buildings to energy requirements. Firstly basic consumption and performance must be measured (e.g. Carbon Trust) and secondly efficiency increased (insulation, modernizing old installations

EUROPEAN HISTORIC HOUSES (UEHHA)



and improving usage and maintenance). The third stage consists in introducing renewable energies and low carbon emission technologies. Kim VANGUERS then presented a revealing case study by the European Renewable Energy Council in Brussels and proved once again the relevance of energy efficiency to historic houses. Hugh GARRETT showed that key technology is already available to developers and that energy efficiency and the principles of conservation are not necessarily contradictory. In fact the presentations by Beat SCHEINDER and Quentin de HULTS proved that conservation and cutting energy consumption can be successfully combined, as

can a reduction in carbon emissions and increased comfort.

This debate underscored the need for greater understanding of the way in which traditional materials, products and structures can work together. It also illustrated the need to evaluate their impact on old buildings. Steady, innovative adjustment and the pooling of all available resources are essential for a perfect match between historic houses and energy efficiency. Solutions can be found locally and regionally and there are clear success stories of combining a comprehensive approach to conservation with cutting energy consumption. Talk is now of adjust-

ment rather than a clash between conservation and energy saving. This adjustment is crucial since it is the only way today to face the new challenges of our time and preserve our heritage.

■ Delphine DUPEUX,
ELO- UEHHA

THE INSTITUTIONAL ECHO

4th -7th June: elections of the European Parliament

In June, 375 million estimated European voters, will have unique opportunity to elect (in a direct universal suffrage) members for the European Parliament. The number of deputies will fall down from 783 MEPs (due to 2007 enlargement) to 736 European deputies, under the Nice Treaty. The Lisbon Treaty established “750+1” deputies (the “1” being a compromise obtain by Italy towards FR and UK, therefore the EP president is not counted in the overall number as generally he/she does not vote).

This is an important organisational challenge, as each national election is different, including even different times for closing of the polling stations. Nevertheless, on the evening of June 7th, we should have the first results for each Member State (MS). From this date, the elected members of the EP will have one month to decide on which party to (or none) join. Currently, there are seven political groups. From the next election, it will take 25 members from seven MS to form a political group, compared with 20 members from six MS now. On a daily basis, MEPs are working on committees and intergroups.

Why is participation to this selection so crucial? Certainly, because the EP is one of the five

main Institutions of the European Union. Since 1979, (from the 1st direct elections) its role has continued to grow, as it is the only elected EU body. The outgoing MEPs were at the heart of the European Commission investiture crises and EU enlargement to 25 countries in 2004; followed by the French and Dutch “no” to Lisbon Treaty in 2005; the European enlargement in 2007 and of the Irish “no” to the same Treaty in 2008.

The forthcoming MEP’s will gain even more powers if the Lisbon Treaty comes into force, especially through the co-decision procedure (legislation role) and budget control.

How therefore do we explain that the surveys done in MS predict such low participation as 31% in Bulgaria or only 13% in Poland (even if more than 80% are pro-European)? Is it really only the presence of the European Institutions in Brussels explaining the 91% participation of Belgians to the elections in 2004 or the presidency of the EU Council explaining the estimated 45% participation in Czech Republic. On average, turnout is falling, from 63% in 1979 to 46% in 2004, and an estimated 34% for this year. Those numbers shows certainly one thing: there is still not enough communication on the role of EP to the European citizens. To tackle this reality such initiative as the “Appeal to European voters” of Amato Group (Action Committee for European Democracy), and the use

of new medias, such as web streaming and opening of a Parliament TV channel has to be felicitated. Also personal choices as the one done by Danuta HUBNER, Commissioner for Regional policy, who is standing as a candidate in Poland, can prove the importance of the EP in shaping the European Union. On the other hand, one should not be surprised of the low participation, if some national disputes give the impression of sending people to the EP who know nothing about EU, to solve local qualms.

The inaugural plenary session of the new EP will take place the 14-15 July in Strasbourg. For the first time in the EP history this session will be not open by the doyen of the elected deputies. It could be called a “clin d’oeil d’histoire” (a wink of history), as 220 years separate the events, but certainly it will not the last “revolution” affecting the EP during its new mandate 2009- 2014.

■ Emmanuelle MIKOSZ

To follow on-live the EP elections:
<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2009>



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ELO at the 5th World Water Forum, Istanbul, Turkey, 16-22 March 2009

The European Landowners Organisation (ELO) attended this key event, gathering 25,000 participants, as a panelist in the session on integrated water resources management (IWRM) and change with five main points to rise higher in political agenda:

- 1) Land tenure and ownership as central factors in the implementation of IWRM;
- 2) Rights and responsibilities of landowners in the decision-making processes affecting water availability and use;
- 3) Provision of public goods and services by private owners;
- 4) Valuation and payments for environmental services (PES) to land managers as tools for sustainable IWRM;
- 5) Involvement and collaboration of ELO in the implementation of the overall EU water policy and specifically in the Water Framework Directive (WFD).

With increasing competition over limited water resources, governments have begun over the last few decades to accept the concept of IWRM as a fundamental approach to resource allocation issues, steering away from traditional, and still institutionally very rooted, sectoral approaches. It provides a framework in which the competing and conflicting needs of multiple users and stakeholders can be explicitly analysed and addressed, in a transparent, systematic and participatory way.

IWRM needs, however, to be practiced at different scales in order for it to be helpful in enabling governments and all stakeholders to determine how to allocate water among increasing energy, agricultural and urban demands.

A sustainable management policy requires socio-economic,

technical and institutional issues to be considered together and not separately: this can prove very challenging as energy, agriculture and urban sectors compete against each other in water demand.

In addition, evidence of climate change and its impacts on droughts and flooding must be included if IWRM planning is to be effective in the long term.

- During the Forum the different points raised by ELO have been taken into account in a very different way. Land tenure, ownership, along with rights and responsibilities of landowners in the IWRM decision-making processes, were clearly not sufficiently included into the discussions. This has been the case also for bringing together more substantially the environmental and agricultural aspects of IWRM, that both still remain too separate in the planning and implementation practices: thus water is mainly supply driven engendering competition and contrast. Public goods and services, including PES have been receiving more attention during the Forum and generally world wide in the recent years.

- The main conclusion that the participation of ELO in the 5th World Water Forum can provide is double. On the one side, agriculture remains a big part of the water problem and its possible solutions: from an unsustainable consumption and diffused pollution, it is urgent to move towards sustainability as core driver of the IWRM. On the other side, the current water situation and the climate change require inevitably and progressively the involvement local players, including land managers and users, in the definition of demand, data, strategies and planning: landowners are therefore required to be proactive in the current and oncoming political processes (e.g. the EU-WFD - http://ec.europa.eu/environment/water/water-framework/index_en.html - or the CAP reform - http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/healthcheck/index_en.htm).

ELO, in collaboration with the International Office for Water, presented early 2009 a proposal to the DG Agri on the agricultural aspects included in the draft river basin plans within the EU Water Framework Directive implementation.

■ Pier Carlo ZINGARI
ELO

Rafael ESCANERO ARRUEGO – new President of GEA- Spain (Grupo de empresas agrarias)

ELO would like to congratulate the new president of GEA, Rafael ESCANERO ARRUEGO, who has been appointed on the 14th of May, during the Extraordinary General Assembly in Madrid. We also would like to thank you Vicente SÁNCHEZ Y SÁNCHEZ-VALDEPEÑAS for his 14 years of very close and fruitful collaboration, and wish him all the best for the future.

New government in Czech Republic

New Czech government took up its duties on the 8th of May, with as Prime Minister Jan FISCHER, and will run the the country till early October, when an early elections should take place. ELO and FCS would like to congratulate Ladislav MIKO, Director-Protecting the Natural Environment, DG Environment, European Commission, who was appointed Minister for the Environment. The same week Czech Senate has adopted the Lisbon treaty, which needs to be signed by President KLAUS to enter into force.

THE ENLARGED EUROPE

The Swedish Presidency's Agricultural Program

The most important issue for the Swedish Presidency will be the assimilation of adaptation to climate change in agriculture, after the publication of the White Paper on adapting to climate change with its annex on agriculture in April 2009.



Göran BILLESON

The White Paper published by the Commission, foresees the essential function of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in the adaptation and acts as a framework for sustainable production, recommends a series of actions on EU and Member States level. Like the embedment of water management and adaptation measures in the national strategies and programmes for 2007-2013. In addition the forestry strategy needs to be updated and a discussion on the EU approach to forest protection and forest information systems is also initiated. Agriculture and climate change will be the subject of the Informal Agricultural Council meeting in mid-September where the White Paper will be discussed. Forestry and Climate change will be the topic on the agenda of Directors-General for Forestry at the end of the month and at the "Rural Areas Shaping the Future"

high-level conference organized on 28-29 October.

Animal Welfare and the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) will be the two other main priorities within agriculture. Concerning fisheries, there will be three major subjects of debate. Firstly, the Presidency is intending to carry on the public consultation process established in April 2009 by the Commission's Green Paper on the reform of the CFP. It will be examined at the EU Fisheries Ministers' meeting at the beginning of July as well as on informal talks. The second issue will be to complete the planned 'Control Regulation' in order to set up a Community system for inspection, monitoring, control, surveillance and enforcement that would allow for effective execution of the CFP regulations and generate a level playing field for fishermen across the EU. Finally,

at December's Council meeting, the Ministers will have to agree on fishing quotas for 2010.

Reacting to the Commission Communication on simplifying the CAP recommended in March 2009 the Presidency is determined to follow up the Czech Presidency's action in further reduction of the 'red tape' through IT use, possible harmonization of cross compliance rules, improvements to quality policy, as well as a more frequent reassessing of legislation.

As part of the work on the future of the CAP and continuation of the Czech Presidency's effort with direct payments within the 'First Pillar' of the CAP, the intention of the Swedish Presidency is to focus on the 'Second Pillar', concerning rural development.

The Presidency foresees that the future CAP for the next planning period (post 2013) will be based on well-focused and minimally trade-distorting support to reach the dual objective of environmental protection and rural development.

■ Nora MINIYN,
ELO

Public Goods Produced by Land Managers Must be Recognised – Perspective of the RISE Foundation

The Swedish Presidency has already expressed its desire to limit CAP funding to a maximum of 40% of the EU budget after 2013 and also to bolster the role of pillar 2, the rural development element of the CAP. They say the future CAP should be built on well-targeted and minimally trade-distorting support to deliver the twin objectives of environmental protection and rural development.



This, they say is in order to complete the work achieved by the Czech Presidency on the first pillar, covering direct support for farmers and land managers. This general trend has been expressed by many contributors to the debate. Whatever the final CAP budget is, and however it is distributed between pillars 1 and 2, the next reform will have to respond to a wealth of new challenges that the sector itself, as well as wider society, stand to face in the first half of this century. It is of the utmost importance to understand the extent to which many of these challenges are linked, whether we are talking about climate change (environmental security), diminishing food stocks (food security), or economic stability.

New challenges notably include the demand for public goods and services – such as eco-system services, including carbon sequestration and the preservation of less favoured areas - that farmers provide, and which are currently not paid for by the market. This subject is attracting growing attention at a time in which the trend in agricultural support points downwards, whilst temperatures, emissions and environmental degradation point upwards. If farm prices rise in the long-term and presumably production costs as well, the opportunity cost of land managers for producing eco-systems and other public goods and services will rise as well. If single farm payments are indeed cut after 2013, then we might well witness farming intensification and landscape neglect. There

is clearly a need for agricultural intensification in some areas, particularly to deal with a rapidly growing global population. However, so far, market signals have actually been distorted, because scarce resources, such as a good atmosphere, biodiversity and beautiful landscapes have been priced at zero. Resource degradation is the consequence. The risk is that it will worsen.

The RISE Foundation sees two ways out. Either one finds a path through the maze of available data in order to attach an attractive price to these public resources, or - if one doesn't know how, doesn't want, or can't do this -, one provides for payment of public goods within the framework of the CAP. In any event, in order to save our planet by ensuring sustainable land management, we need to give a value to what cannot be bought such as most public goods produced by land managers. For this reason, RISE set up a Task Force in the summer of 2008 led by Allan BUCKWELL to analyse the nature, scale and value of public environmental goods and services produced by land managers. The study has been co-financed by the Italian Government and the report is due to be published by the summer.

■ Jethro SCHIANSKY



YOUNG FRIENDS OF THE COUNTRYSIDE

GMOs: A controversial issue

GMOs have been a popular issue in the past few years, and it seems it will remain at the centre of public attention in the future. The growing world population and the increasing demand on affordable safe food require new solutions in agriculture. As Paul KRUGMAN at the second Forum for the Future of Agriculture said - we need another green revolution.

GM crops are grown in 23 countries on 114 million hectares and research trials are underway on six continents. But in the world there are 209 crops, here in Europe we only have one. The public opinion is still against GMOs. Just a few days ago, on 14th April Germany joined France, Greece, Hungary and other EU countries opposed to GM crop cultivation by ordering a ban on Monsanto's MON 810 maize, despite European rulings that the biotech grain is safe.¹

The scientific proof of the GMOs safety is shown in the risk assessment made and examined regularly by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) at the request of the European Commission (EC). Studies over 15 years in 400 independent research institutes found that GM crops approved in Europe are either as safe as, if not safer, than their conventional counterparts. As Nathalie MOLL – the executive director of EuropaBio the European Association for Bioindustries – explained in an interview to the EurActive “GM crops are safer than their conventional counterparts, because they've been tested for cancer, for mutagenicity (if what you eat is going to mutate your genes), allergenicity, toxicity to you, the environment and to non-targeted organisms such as butterflies and ladybirds etc. GM crops are the only plants, the only foods that have been tested regarding their safety.

Definition:

Word on words: GM stands for genetic modification or genetically modified. It usually refers to the moving of genes between species and varieties using a technique called ‘gene splicing’, although all methods of breeding modify and exchange genes.

Organisms bred using GM are referred to as GMOs – genetically modified organisms. Gene splicing is just one of the new methods available to investigate life at the molecular level, which are sometimes referred to under the general term ‘biotechnology’.

Resource:

<http://www.senseaboutscience.org.uk/PDF/MakingSenseofGM.pdf>

So, for example, if you try to make a strawberry go through the approval process of GMOs, it would not be approved, because they are allergenic to some people - the same for a kiwi or a potato. So at least for the GM products, you can know - for the others, you can't have any idea.² “

The German opposition could be connected with the coming European elections, because the majority of the population in the EU is still against GMOs. Stefan RAUSCHEN, junior scientist in Germany working for nearly 6 years on biosafety research, wrote in his publication about the situation in Germany, that there is currently no public acceptance of plant biotech. He found simple reasons: fear, uncertainty and doubt. “Fear that some unforeseeable major disaster will definitely come true. Uncertainty over the social and economic consequences of the large-scale cultivation of GM plants and over whether we can actu-

ally assess and foresee every possible way in which a GM plant could do harm. And doubt over whether the benefits are real possibilities or just marketing propaganda. These are the main motives driving people to oppose green biotech and which are strategically and successfully used by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) with an anti-biotech agenda.

As an aside, most German citizens know little about the basic aspects of agriculture and biology and are therefore quick to oppose GM crops as something they do not understand. They also do not see that there is no such thing as a “risk-free” technology. Every human activity carries a multitude of risks for a large array of possible harms. Risk perception seems not to be strength of the human mind, however³. “

In the meantime, it seems that political pressure is growing in the

1 <http://www.euractiv.com/en/cap/germany-joins-ranks-anti-gmo-countries/article-181267>

2 <http://www.euractiv.com/en/biotech/gmos-shouldn-mix-precautionary-principle-public-perception/article-168021>

3 http://www.truthabouttrade.org/index2.php?option=com_content&do_pdf=1&id=13691

4 http://www.linuxpromagazine.com/online/news/richard_stallman_farmers_and_the_german_csu_party_unite_against_patents

5 http://www.gmo-compass.org/eng/news/stories/227.eurobarometer_europeans_biotechnology.html

6 <http://www.farmersguardian.com/story.asp?storycode=24418>

YOUNG FRIENDS OF THE COUNTRYSIDE

CSU party on Ilse Aigner, the German minister for Agriculture, to declare further prohibitions for GM plants. Germany now also advocates the prohibition of field trials with genetically modified Amflora potato developed by BASF. This potato can be used exclusively to produce industrial starch. EU Member States will decide soon about whether it will be allowed to cultivate it in the EU. The genetic engineering law allowed large scale field trials in several German federal states in recent years.

To handle the issue Annette SCHAVAN, the Federal Minister for Research, initiated a "round table" about green gene technology, which will be held in Berlin on May 20th, 2009. Her idea is to create a dialogue involving all stakeholders: «All affected parties should come together, including associations, companies, science representatives, non-governmental organisations and churches⁴»

In the recent years the acceptance of biotechnology among Europeans is on the rise. According to Eurobarometer survey in 2006, slightly more than half of European citizens are confident that applications of biotechnology will improve their quality of life⁵.

The European farmers are not in favourable situation, although they are aware of the possibilities provided by biotechnologies, but the GM maize currently authorised in Europe just gives an increased protection against corn borer infestation, while farmers outside EU can choose from wide variety of GM plants resistant for other kind of pests and the national restrictions even narrowing their choices. The increased demand and competition on the world market make it necessary to implement changes, and allow farmers to cultivate the



same thing that they are obliged to import now.

As Dr Julian LITTLE, chairman of the UK's Agricultural Biotechnology Council pointed out: "Sadly, no GM crops of benefit to British farmers have been approved for cultivation in the past 10 years, denying those who want to grow GM crops in this country the right to do so.

Farmers need the freedom to choose modern and efficient high-yielding farming methods based on tried and tested science in order both to produce enough food and to safeguard our natural resources⁶".

Whilst the population continues to increase, the growth rate of production is slowing down; therefore farmers have to face growing challenges in a less predictable climate. In

addition, the increased use of arable land for urban purposes as well as the increase of agricultural commodity prices makes it urgent to find new solutions. GMOs should therefore be considered as an efficient tool to tackle this problem, but new issues like environmental sustainability should be also considered. Education, availability of comprehensive information and public discussion has to play a more important role in the future. To be able to make proper decisions the general public should be made more aware of the realistic risks and benefits of this new technology.

■ Nora MINIYN,
ELO- YFCS

BOOK OF THE MONTH

Natura 2000 - safeguarding Europe's biodiversity

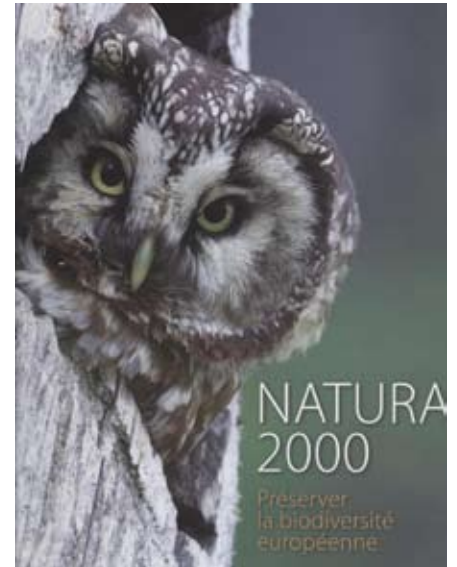
Natura 2000 is one of the most significant achievements of EU environmental policy and the book tells the story of how the European Union has built up the world's largest network of protected areas. The network consists of some 25,000 sites, covering almost one fifth of the land territory of the EU. From the Arctic Circle to the Mediterranean, Europe boasts a range of landscapes and natural conditions which contain a wealth of biodiversity.

The Natura 2000 network is the cornerstone of our policy to protect Europe's biodiversity. It is a model that other countries have been looking to copy because it combines a scientific approach, with effective

legal protection and also the flexibility to allow economic activities to continue. Sustainable farming, fishing, forestry – even infrastructure developments that are not damaging to the conservation values of the sites – can all take place inside Natura sites. The legal framework that we have developed can be best understood as finding a way for man and nature to co-exist.

This book will take you on a journey through some of the finest Natura 2000 sites in the European Union. I hope that you will enjoy the rich variety of landscapes and wildlife that our continent has to offer.

■ Karl FALKENBERG
EC DG Environment



Diary Dates 2009

26-29 May 2009, Brussels , Charlemagne Building

Conference «Sustainable development: a challenge for European research»
http://ec.europa.eu/research/sd/conference/2009/index_en.cfm

27-28 May, Prague

Conference “Wilderness and Large Natural Habitat Areas”, organised by EC DG Environment and Czech Presidency
www.wildeurope.org

4-7 June, European Union

Elections to the European Parliament
www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2009

9-11 June, Bilbao

European Forum on the Energies of the Future
www.europeanfutureenergyforum.com

11-14 June, Prague

General Assembly of Friends of the Countryside
elo@elo.org

16-17 June, Stockholm

General Assembly of ELO
elo@elo.org

18 June, Brussels

workshop “Conflict management in the Natura 2000 network”, co-organised by EC DG Environment and ECNC, with the active participation of Mark THOMASIN-FOSTER, ELO President

23-26 June, Brussels

Green Week, with the special focus on Climate Change and Energy issues, organised by EC DG Environment
<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/greenweek>

29 June – 3 July, Hambourg

17th European Biomass Conference and Exhibition

- From Research to Industry and Markets

<http://ec.europa.eu/research>



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