

environmental and health risks, of course, the dependency on a few multinationals, discomfort with the industrialisation of nature, patenting of life; concern for the good reputation of regional products. Then there are additional costs that are not paid by the biotech producers and operators but are to be paid by those who want to continue producing GMO-free, and finally the threat to small-scale agriculture, organic farmers and medium-sized food businesses. Why does no insurance company want to secure the risks of gene technology if everything is as harmless as industry claims?

The movement for GMO-free regions is supported by conservative and green politicians, liberals and social democrats. Farmers and environmentalists are more unified on this question than on many other issues. Big and small firms, trade unions, churches, consumer organisations and local heritage associations all share a common interest. It is no longer just a question of stopping the spectre of gene technology. New trans-regional co-operations are emerging and with them a new self-confidence in defending common interests against the bureaucracy in Brussels and national governments - in short, a lively, down-to-earth and more democratic Europe of the regions.

This publication has been prepared for the Second Conference of GMO-free Regions in Europe. We are pleased to present impressions from this movement - and cordially invite you to participate.

Benedikt Haerlin

International consumer movement and GMOs

GM crops offer few benefits to consumers but pose potential risks to health and the environment as well as moral and ethical concerns. In the past year the international consumer movement has increasingly focused on problems of GMO contamination.

Consumers International (CI) is a federation representing 234 consumer organisations in 113 countries. In 2004 CI responded to the spread of GMOs, and a lack of regulation to protect consumers rights, by launching a campaign to counter these problems.

The CI GM campaign aims to protect consumer rights to information, safety, and choice. This means that all GM products must be labelled, and independently safety tested/ rigorously approved. GM-free food must remain widely available for all consumers to choose by governments setting strict rules that aim to prevent contamination and allow for the establishment of GM-free zones

The EU is the world's largest importer of agricultural goods. Decisions taken within the EU will impact on GMO approvals made by governments in developing countries which will in turn impact on consumers in those countries.

For some CI members minimising contamination has meant supporting a ban on the cultivation of GMOs in their countries. Consumer groups in Switzerland and Benin have supported such a ban.

CI has acted to raise awareness on problems of GM contamination by organising an international conference in September 2005. It concluded GM producers or exporters who cause contamination must be made liable, and that GM-free zones minimise the risk of contamination of GM-free crops.

David Cuming