



PRESS INFORMATION

Will Green Gene Technology help to feed the world?

The topic of Rio and Johannesburg now at the ABIC 2004 in Cologne

Cologne, May 28th 2004 “Within a decade, no man, woman, or child should go hungry to bed.” This was the promise made by Henry Kissinger at the World Food Conference in 1974. Thirty years have since gone by, and what has come of it?

The struggle against hunger had to be put back on the agenda again at the World Food Summit in 1996. Strategies were worked out at top political level to free at least half of the world's hungry people from their misery by 2015. Five years later, it was hoped in both north and south that the discussions in Johannesburg would bring significant new impulses. One of the key questions was the contributions which could possibly be made by modern methods such as agbiotechnology.

According to information issued by the World Food Organisation (FAO), 826 million people are still suffering from hunger. Of these, 792 million live in the developing countries. Although enough food is being produced throughout the world to cover the needs of the whole human race, hunger is actually continuing to increase, especially in India, southern Africa and a number of the former East Bloc countries.

Genetically modified foods remain a subject of controversial discussion in Europe, but the United Nations are already thinking about making extensive use of them in the less developed countries. *“The poorer countries are profiting too little from genetic research in agriculture”*, as the United Nations have complained. According to an FAO report, the use of gene technology in agriculture could help to increase the incomes of poor farmers. At the same time, the FAO has criticised the low level of investment in biotechnology research towards developing key crop varieties for these regions.

The Kenyan biologist, **Florence Wambugu, Director of a Harvest Biotech Foundation International in Kenya**, has been concerning herself for many years with these problems. As a step towards solving them, Dr. Wambugu has been doing research for over ten years in cooperation with the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI) on transgenic sweet potatoes. First successes are already clearly emerging – with the SPFM-virus resistance obtained in this way, the transgenic tuber is yielding on average 20 percent higher yields. Dr. Wambugu is placing similar hopes

in a current research project to introduce resistances to devouring pests such as weevils. *"Our people have no money for expensive pesticides, but with the aid of gene technology we could help them to produce good harvests,"* said Florence Wambugu.

During the podium discussion at the ABIC 2004 in Cologne on 12 September, and again during the plenary talks on Tuesday, 14 September 2004, Florence Wambugu will lecture on *"the urgency of new solutions for Africa"*.

In this "Year of Innovation", Germany will be acting for the first time as host country to one of the world's major conferences on plant biotechnology, to be held under the motto *"AgBiotech goes Europe"*. Investors, industrial managers, scientists and policy makers from all over the world will come together in 2004 for an intensive exchange of experience with a view to giving new momentum to the development of agricultural biotechnology.

The ABIC forum was set up in 1996 to discuss the results of research and development and facilitate joint ventures between research institutes and industrial partners. Until this year the conference was held once every two years in Canada. Host country for 2006 will be Australia. The organisation of ABIC 2004, for the first time outside Canada, was entrusted to Phytowelt GmbH in Nettetal.

Further information on ABIC 2004 can be found under: <http://www.abic2004.org>

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