



Official Participant

Report Template for EU Events at EXPO

Event Title :	Public Discussion on Research Needs to Better Understand Risks and Benefits of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) PreSto GMO ERA-Net research project	Date:	17/08/2015
Event Organiser:	Università Cattolica Sacro Cuore Piacenza- OPERA Research Centre		
Event Target Group:	Researchers, Risk Communicators, Risk analysts, Regulators, Consumers		
Rapporteur:	Maura Calliera, Ettore Capri- Università Cattolica Sacro Cuore- Piacenza, Italy Email: maura.calliera@unicatt.it ; etto.re.capri@unicatt.it		

Event Concept

What do we need to know about GMOs?

What are the proven risks and benefits? In many cases there are no clear answers.

The risks and potential benefits of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) are viewed very differently from one European country to another. Do genetically modified crops support sustainable agriculture or could they harm biodiversity? Will GM crops help feed the world? What are their economic impacts and do they pose new health risks? It seems that European societies have not found clear answers to such questions, so GMOs are still a highly controversial topic. As a result, the EU Member States follow different approaches. For example, some allow the cultivation of GM crops, and others have enacted national cultivation bans.

This situation is linked in part to gaps in our knowledge, which may hamper a widely accepted evaluation of the risks and benefits of existing GM products. Views on risks and benefits also depend on the value systems, expectations and concerns of citizens and NGOs. These are issues that research projects have probably not addressed in sufficient detail in the past.

In addition, new GM applications are being developed world- wide and could reach the European market in the foreseeable future. This is another challenge facing Europe in its search for a responsible approach to this matter.

The activities and results of PreSto GMO ERA-Net (Preparatory Steps towards a GMO Research ERA-Net), an EU research project funded by the Seventh Framework Programme of the European Union, were presented. The main goal of the project is to create and implement an ERA-Net (European Research Area Network) that will coordinate transnational research on the effects of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in the areas of human and animal health, the environment and techno-economics.

The event was organised as part of the OPERA "Caffè Expo" initiative started in 2012 to encourage debates on topics around the core theme of EXPO Milano 2015. The main idea is that informal communications favour new opportunities to share ideas, create new networks, and promote the collaboration and knowledge sharing between general public, professionals and institutions. The event was organized as such: after a briefly presentation of the main project results in order to reach a common understanding, a distinguished scientist addressed the topic while another expert or entrepreneur with a strong expertise "challenged" him with questions and comments, interpreting and expressing the general ideas of the public. Expert professors in the subject managed and stimulated the discussion involving all participants.

Expert: Stefan Rauschen, Project Management, Forschungszentrum Jülich and coordinator of the project;

Provocateur: Piero Morandini, University of Milan, Milano, Department of Life Sciences;

Moderator: Ettore Capri Catholic University of Sacred Heart, OPERA Research Centre on Sustainability.

Expected Outcomes

- Identification of gaps in existing knowledge relevant to GMO risk-benefit assessments.
- To allow an informed discussion about whether and how biotechnology can be used to provide solutions to current and future challenges

Main Conclusions

- The risks and potential benefits of the use of GMOs are viewed quite differently in the different Member States of the EU and Associated Countries.
- Continuous feedback on recent developments and new challenges in the field of GMO research are of paramount importance.

Even if there are countries with a precautionary or straight negative stance toward current GMOs, the GMOs in the pipeline might display characteristics that would make them appealing for a future bioeconomy. Building networks and joining forces could lead to a EU leading position in this field of science, but capacities and infrastructures are needed as well as harmonisation in regulatory environments and framework conditions that are conducive to research.

Communication focusing on benefits is needed.

What follow-up actions emerged from this event?

Recommendations for the preparation and implementation of an ERA-Net dealing with research on the impacts of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) on the environment, human and animal health, and techno-economic/socio-economic aspects within the European Union (EU) build upon the results of the PreSto GMO ERA-Net project funded by the European Commission under the 7th Framework Programme are available at <http://www.presto-gmo-era-net.eu/>