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Too close for comfort

The relationship between the biotech industry and the European Commission

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Too close for comfort:

The relationship between the biotech industry and the European Commission

Executive summary

It is no secret that the EU political class has embraced the neoliberal agenda. In food and farming this translates as high-technology intensive farming with patented inputs and outputs (pesticides, genetically modified seeds, etc) that generate wealth for European industry. The basic aim, clearly stated in EU policy objectives such at the Lisbon Agenda, is to make Europe a leader in the global economy. This has been expressed as different policy slogans – the 'Biosociety' in the 1980s, the 'knowledge-based economy' in the 1990s, and the 'Knowledge-Based Bio-Economy' (KBBE) in the current decade.

Problems that our society faces – food, health, biodiversity, job creation – are used to justify these political and economic goals, which therefore become possible if not inevitable. For example, "we can't not have genetically modified food and crops because they create jobs" is an argument that we often hear. But data actually indicates that this is not the case, and that it is other food and farming types, like organic farming, that are creating jobs, showing rapid growth and stimulating rural economies. However, these alternatives have been politically sidelined by the KBBE "mindset".

This report examines one of the results of this political mindset and agenda – that of corporate lobby power and its access to one of the key EU institutions, the European Commission. This is not a comprehensive study of the agri-biotech lobby at the EU level, but rather focuses on one of the key biotech lobby groups – EuropaBio – and recent examples of the very cosy relationship between the companies who stand to make considerable profits from agricultural biotechnology, and policy makers at the European Commission.

The European Commission is the executive arm of the European Union and is made up of 40 Directorate Generals (DGs) – the equivalent to Ministries at the national level. The EU's current laws for genetically modified foods and crops (known as GM or GMOs) fall under the environment and health Directorates. The Environment Commissioner has taken a clearly precautionary approach to this new technology, in line with his mandate. This does not however fit in with the KBBE concept and there has been a unique singling out and sidelining of the Environment DG in Commission policy decisions, due to strong pressure from DGs for Trade, Research, Agriculture, Enterprise and Industry, Internal Markets as well as the Commission's Secretary General and even its President Barroso.

EuropaBio is one of the main and most active lobby groups on GM food and crops at the EU level, and boasts of its "excellent *working relations*" with the European Commission. The group's agri-biotech lobby efforts are headed by Bayer Cropscience, DuPont/Pioneer, Monsanto and Syngenta. As the GM food and crops market is dominated by these very few large corporations, EuropaBio is essentially pushing the interests of these at the European Commission and elsewhere.

This takes the form, amongst others, of breakfast meetings, political meetings, ad hoc meetings both private and public. The sphere of influence extends from policy officers to the most senior levels of the Commission, with a very high number of biotech industry events attended by a wide range of Commissioners. Their regular presence at EuropaBio events strongly indicates that this is in fact a routine presence. Indeed, key Commissioners were described at an EuropaBio policy day as "*gung-ho*" in favour of biotechnology.

The biotech lobby and its corporate members are members of Commission networks and working groups. This includes a network with Member States and the European Commission's DG Enterprise. The biotech industry is also heavily represented on the European Commission's Competitiveness in Biotechnology Advisory Group whose existence is actually written into the EU's Biotech Strategy. Such influence has resulted in the Commission promoting less regulation, more finance and research funding for a sector that the public has overwhelmingly rejected for the last 10 years. The extent of the Commission's support for GM food and crops has even extended to them turning a blind eye to the European Parliament's refusal to accept that GM food and crops are good for EU competitiveness.

Europabio has also boasted of its targeted lobby campaign on research funding which has resulted in agricultural biotechnology being one of the key themes in the 53 billion euro EU research programme. "Public-private" partnerships are heavily supported by the European Commission, with specific technology platforms for GM food and crops, agrofuels and food more generally. These initiatives are nicely dressed up, but in essence are about channelling public funds to corporate economic interests.

The closeness of the biotech industry and Commission is not surprising given the dominance of the KBBE agenda over EU food and farming policies. And the biotech corporations that dominate the genetically modified seed, food and feed markets obviously stand to make financial and market-share gains from its success. In this they are also aided by the European Commission's research agency (the Joint Research Centre) which confuses institutions expertise (which is selected and guided according to the dominant mindset) with independent scientific research.

The biotech lobby also spends much energy on creating socially acceptable reasons for why GM food and crops are needed, messages which are readily taken up and promoted by the European Commission. Two recent examples include the panic-mongering on the availability of animal feed in Europe, and the "greening" of GMOs to fight climate change through the controversial use of biofuels.

The report concludes that the doors of the European Commission are wide open to the biotech industry lobby. Key parts of the Commission are in fact more tuned in to industry than their own colleagues at DG Environment who are being clearly marginalised as the KBBE policy concept is aggressively pushed by both biotech lobby and the largely pro-GMO Commission.

Public opposition to GM food and crops are completely ignored and overruled as the EU's administrative body promotes an application of a new technology that will only benefit a handful of very large multinational corporations. Not exactly a shining example of public service and democracy.

Recommendations:

1. Legislation to reign in the power of corporate lobbying power
A mandatory system of electronic registration and reporting for lobbyists should be introduced, covering all lobbyists with a significant annual lobbying budget, and be linked to enforceable ethics rules for lobbyists. Formal and informal meetings as well as correspondence between Commission officials and lobbyists should be logged, so that it becomes clear who is attempting to shape which policies. The compositions of expert groups advising the Commission must be made public, and cases of privileged access and undue influence such as joint task forces in which corporate interests dominate and the privileged status accorded to business lobby groups like EuropaBio must be terminated.

2. The EU Biotech Strategy should be revised to acknowledge the failure of GM food and crops
The EU strategy must acknowledge that EU citizens have now been consistently opposed to genetically modified food and crops for ten years. The right to GM-free food and farming must be unconditionally respected. The different biotechnology sectors (green, white, red) should be separately assessed according to their strengths and weaknesses, acknowledging that evidence shows the failure of genetically modified food and crops. This should be reflected when fixing new targets and planning research funding.

3. EU research priorities and funding should focus on ecologically compatible farming schemes
Future research priorities, including under FP7, should de-prioritise funding on "biotechnology and food". Instead, the focus on agri-environmental sectors should be increased, for example making funding available for an EU research project on the socio-economic impacts of agri-environmental farming in EU member states.

Introduction

It is no secret that the EU political class has embraced the neoliberal free-market agenda. In food and farming this translates into high-technology intensive farming with patented inputs and outputs (such as pesticides and genetically modified seeds) that generate wealth for business. The basic aim, clearly stated in EU policy objectives such at the Lisbon Agenda, is to make Europe a leader in the global economy. This has been expressed as different policy slogans – the 'Biosociety' in the 1980s, the 'knowledge-based economy' in the 1990s, and the 'Knowledge-Based Bio-Economy' (KBBE) in the current decade[1].

"The KBBE links agbiotech with neoliberal agendas – for extending industrial agriculture, commoditising natural resources, marketising public-sector research and providing new regulations to facilitate such changes. The drive to maximize profits through intensification goes hand-in-hand with a flexible labour market in the agricultural sector, promoting super-exploitation of migrant labour in particular"[2].

Tackling problems that our society faces, such as biodiversity loss, rural poverty, competing in a globalised market – many of which are caused by the very neoliberal approach now being offered – are turned around to further justify more of the same. It is argued for example that we need genetically modified foods and crops (known also as GM or GMOs) because they make Europe competitive and create jobs. The fact that more sustainable alternatives such as organic farming are out-performing the high-tech, industry-led solutions – by creating more jobs, showing rapid growth and stimulating rural economies[3] – is conveniently pushed to the political sidelines by the KBBE mindset.

Decisions that go in the direction of the KBBE concept are justified according to "sound science" by governments, the European Commission and the biotech industry. However, "*such narratives also represent science as the proper basis of government policy, thus equating science with official expertise. In practice, expertise is selected and guided according to dominant policy frameworks"* [4].

This report examines one of the results of this political mindset and agenda – that of corporate lobby power and the access it has to one of the EU's key institutions, the European Commission. This is not a comprehensive study of the lobbying by agribusiness at the EU level, but a focus on one of the key biotech lobby groups – EuropaBio – and recent examples of the cosy relationship between its members, who stand to make considerable profits from agricultural biotechnology, and policy makers at the European Commission. The report also addresses a recent major study on the impacts of biotechnology carried out by the Commission's research unit and examines whether its conclusions fairly reflect the state of the industry to date.

GM foods and crops are widely opposed by the public across the European Union (EU). Studies show that Europeans are not adverse to new technologies, but when it comes to GM foods, then the public believes that they "*should not be encouraged*" as they are seen as "*morally unacceptable*" and as a "*risk to society*"[5]. Indeed, the introduction of GMOs in food and farming has been one of the most controversial issues concerning the adoption of new technologies, both in terms of societal acceptance and scientific uncertainty.

Support for GM foods and crops in the EU is therefore mainly restricted to agribusiness and industrial farmers, parts of the scientific community, a handful of national governments and important parts of the European Commission. Whilst it is understandable that agribusiness and the branches of science involved in biotechnology support and promote its use, it is unclear why some governments or parts of the European Commission take such a pro-GMO line given the failure of GM crops and foods to deliver social, environmental or economic benefits in Europe.

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[1] "European Quality Agriculture as an Alternative Bio-economy" , 2007, Dr. Les Levidow, Biotechnology Policy Group, Faculty of Technology, Open University http://technology.open.ac.uk/cts/bpg.htm

[2] See ref 1

[3] http://www.foeeurope.org/publications/2007/FoEE_biotech_MTR_midlifecrisis_March07.pdf

[4] See ref 1

[5] http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_244b_en.pdf

Only the depth of public feeling and the opposition from a significant number of member states has restricted the Commission's enthusiasm for GMOs over the past 10 years. However, the positive approach taken by departments in the Commission dealing with Industry, Trade and Agriculture has led to a weaker regulatory framework, proposals for widespread contamination and the breaking of a five year long moratorium on new GM foods and crops in May 2004. Since then, the Commission has used its legal powers to approve all new GM foods and feeds for import after EU member states have failed to support, with the necessary majority, any GMO put forward for commercialisation.

This report looks at how the European Commission reacts to new political pushes from the biotech industry and focuses on three examples: the setting of new targets for the development of GM food and crops in the EU, the use of agrofuels (also known as biofuels) to further promote GMOs, and the use of threats in the animal feed sector to get Europe to open up to more GMOs.

This report comes at a time when the lobby scene in Brussels is under the spotlight. An estimated 15 000 lobbyists roam the corridors of power in Brussels, the majority representing industry interests. Without rules on transparency and ethics for lobbying, the influence of corporate lobbyists on EU policy-making has largely remained out of public sight. The privileged access granted to corporate interests by parts of the Commission, and the resulting undue influence over EU policy-making, raises serious concerns over the impartiality of EU decision-making and its democratic principle.

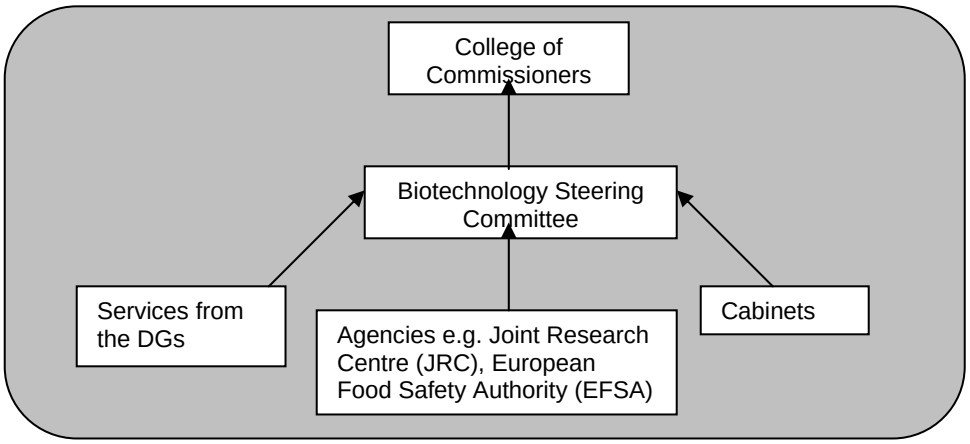
'Policy coherence' at the European Commission

The European Commission is the executive arm of the European Union and is made up of 40 Directorate Generals (DGs) – the equivalent to Ministries at the national level. The Commission is led by a President (currently Portugal's Jose Manuel Barroso), and 26 Commissioners head up the different DGs related to specific issues (for example Environment and Trade). The President and Commissioners have their own Cabinets, which are political appointees, and the DGs are made up of civil servants (known as the services). To ensure policy coherence and the smooth running of the Commission there is also a Secretariat General (SG) with a staff of approximately 600. At the head of the SG, there is a Secretary General who is the Commission's most senior official, currently Catherine Day.

GMO issues fall under the competence of a number of different Commission DGs: Environment, Health, Agriculture, Internal markets, Development, Trade, Enterprise & Industry and Research. Because of the different agendas promoted by each DG, a Biotechnology Steering Committee (BSC) was established to coordinate the Commission's biotechnology policy. The BSC is chaired by the Secretary General, Catherine Day. Both Cabinets (political advisors to the Commissioners) and services (the civil servants working for the DGs) attend the meetings, drawing together both the political and technical branches of the Commission. In addition, some of the EU agencies and services also attend BSC meetings, such as DG Research's Joint Research Centre (JRC) and the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA). The Committee meets approximately every two months, although emergency meetings are held if necessary.

Because of the clear differences in opinion between the different DGs the BSC also acts as a kind of arbitration body. If disagreements cannot be solved then the issue usually goes up to the College of Commissioners to decide (these are bi-weekly meetings of all 26 Commissioners). Despite the importance of the BSC, no agendas or minutes of its meetings are publicly available. Figure 1. shows how GMO policy making is coordinated within the Commission.

figure 1: GMO policy coordination within the European Commission



As is the case between national ministries, there is competition and sometimes disagreement between the DGs on various policies and positions. On GMOs however, there has been a unique singling out, and sidelining, of DG Environment and the Environment Commissioner, Stavros Dimas. To a lesser extent, DG Health and Consumer Protection, headed up by Commissioner Kyprianou, has also been targeted. Commissioner Dimas has taken a precautionary approach to GMOs based on scientific uncertainty and unknown long term effects. Because of this, the DGs for Trade, Research, Agriculture, Enterprise and Industry, Internal Markets and the Secretariat General are placing DG Environment under considerable pressure, with rumours that President Barroso is so displeased by Commissioner Dimas's stance that he could decide to overrule the Commissioner on GMO issues.

Set up for close cooperation

The biotech industry's umbrella organisation in Brussels is EuropaBio, in its own words "*the voice of the European biotech industry*". It not only acts as a direct lobby group but also acts as the interface between the biotech companies themselves and the European Commission. Its influence spreads across the different Directorates General (DGs) of the Commission, the member states and the EU's agencies.

How EuropaBio works

All the major companies involved in producing and promoting GM crops and foods are members of EuropaBio. The lobby group is split into a number of working councils; for GM foods, Green Biotechnology Europe (GBE) has been set up to "*fulfil the information need of all stakeholders, increase the overall confidence in agricultural biotech products and be a trusted interlocutor for agricultural biotechnology policy-makers*". A number of cross-cutting temporary Task Forces and fixed Working Groups also exist. EuropaBio claims that the GBE unit is active in policy development and advocacy in the political arena at Brussels and Member State level[6] – box 1. outlines its structure.

Box 1. EuropaBio's 'Green Biotechnology Europe' structure

GBE Management Committee

The GBE Management Committee is an independent unit set up within EuropaBio to focus on plant biotechnologies. The Management Committee includes one representative per company who has the role of helping to set up appropriate and achievable strategies together with the three operating committees (Communications and Acceptance OC; Political Outreach OC and Regulatory Systems OC).

Chair: DuPont/Pioneer
Secretariat: GBE/EuropaBio

Communication and Acceptance Operating Committee

The main role of this committee is to strengthen relationships with different stakeholders (media, farmers, feed/food chain, scientific community, NGOs), to develop pro-active and re-active communication messages supporting better regulatory and political environments to develop effective messages, and to ensure dissemination of information and scientific data about the application of biotechnology in agriculture.

Chair: Monsanto
Secretariat: GBE/EuropaBio
GBE/EuropaBio

Political Outreach Operating Committee

The Political Outreach OC develops and implements advocacy campaigns on priority areas by working closely with EU institutions' representatives and Member State permanent representations. This committee is also responsible for building synergies with Member States' own political outreach as well as maintaining close contacts and interacting with other trade organizations.

Chairman: Pioneer/DuPont
Secretariat: not listed

Regulatory Systems Operating Committee

The main task of the Regulatory Systems OC is to monitor and influence legislative changes and the implement of regulations at European and Members State levels, to prepare plant biotech industry technical positions and recommendations, to work with feed and food chain to develop industry positions and to make known the European Industry positions at an international level.

Chairman: Syngenta
Secretariat: GBE/EuropaBio

[6] http://www.europabio.org/GBE.htm

EuropaBio is not the only biotech industry lobby group at the EU level, however it is amongst the most active. It represents 85 corporate and associate members and 25 national biotechnology associations. Whilst it claims this represents 1800 small and medium sized businesses, the GM food and crops sector is dominated by a small number of large multinationals, notably Monsanto, BayerCropscience, Syngenta, BASF, Dow/Pioneer and DuPont.

Other key lobby groups[7]

The **European Seed Association** (ESA) represents the European seed industry (both non-GM and GM) active in research, breeding, production and marketing of seeds. ESA's primary goals are to work for strong intellectual property rights relating to plants and seeds (i.e. against the rights of farmers to save seeds); 'fair and proportionate regulation' of the European seed industry (i.e. against obligatory labeling and other restrictive rules); and freedom of choice for customers (i.e. GM seeds should be an option for farmers).

Trade associations representing food companies operating downstream also have an interest in GM issues. Most of these other organisations work only on those specific issues that concern them.

The **American Soybean Association** (ASA), for example, promotes the interests of thousands of US soy farmers always looking for export markets. Its lobby efforts therefore focused on getting GMOs authorised, and the labelling Regulations.

The **CIAA** (Confederation of Food and Drink Industries of the EU) represents the food and drink industry that has huge interests in the use of GM ingredients in consumer products. They have focused mainly on the Food and Feed Regulation and GM labelling. Companies like Unilever, Nestlé and Kraft Foods were initially very opposed to the new labelling rules, claiming that labels would 'stigmatize their products and confuse consumers'. Later, CIAA dropped this attitude and designed guidelines for companies to help them applying the new rules. *"A considerable number of consumers throughout Europe are still reluctant to buy GM-derived products. The food and drink industry respects this"*, explains the CIAA website.

Other pro-GM industry sectors include the oil crushers, the enzyme industry, and to a certain extent the lobby organisation for big conventional farmers **COGECA**. However, they represent quite different groups of producers and therefore often have difficulty at arriving at a common position.

AMCHAM-EU, the American Chambers of Commerce in Brussels, described by the Economist as "*'the most effective lobbying force in town* (Brussels, red.)". Their AgroFood Committee, chaired by Cargill, deals with biotechnology issues but their lobbying activities have been rather invisible from the outside world.

[7] Taken from: http://www.corporateeurope.org/biotechbrussels.html

Lobbying in the corridors of power

Unsurprisingly, the public is not able to see the full workings of the industry lobby machinery but there is a enough information in the public domain to see how groups like EuropaBio lobby and, more importantly, how willing some parts of the European Commission are to participate in their events and represent their interests.

GMOs for Breakfast?

EuropaBio has in the past organised monthly breakfast meetings, usually inviting someone from the Commission to speak. These have covered all biotechnology issues, including GMO issues, and have been attended by a number of very senior Commission staff. For example, February's breakfast meeting in 2006 was with Philippe Brunet, Deputy Head of Cabinet of Commissioner Kyprianou (DG Health and Consumer Protection), and the meeting in May 2005 was with Mrs Georgette Lalis, Director for Consumer Goods (including biotechnology and pharmaceuticals) in DG Enterprise. The meeting in the previous month was with Christian Siebert, Head of Unit Biotechnology and Competitiveness, DG Enterprise.

Biotech Policy Days

The European Commission has also been keen to send senior representatives to rub shoulders with biotech firms at EuropaBio's annual policy days in Brussels. In October 2005 EuropaBio claimed that "*More than 22 CEOs and VPs of biotech and life science companies met with Commissioner Potocnik and Commission Vice President Verheugen to propose and discuss policy measures to improve the environment for biotech in Europe*"[8]. According to EuropaBio, "*both Commissioners gave very encouraging signals. Commissioner Potocnik said that he is convinced of the important role biotech is playing and will play in building the knowledge based economy and called on the industry to lobby national governments to support an increase in research funds under the new Framework Programme. Commissioner Verheugen told the industry that better Regulation and Biotech were his two top priorities and that the industry could count on his support.*"

Following its successful Biotech Policy day in 2005, EuropaBio organized a "Brussels Day" in October 2006. It was promoted as a "*national outreach event where key CEOs from different European countries will meet their national representatives from Permanent Representations, European Parliament and media.*" 10 national delegations of company CEOs and senior executives met with over 50 national representatives from the European Parliament, European Commission and the Council of Ministers. EuropaBio stated that the meeting was to "*bring key messages from the industry to EU decision makers on core biotech issues*". Again, some parts of the Commission did not disappoint. Speakers from the Commission included Thibaut Kleiner, DG Competition and Stéphane Hogan, DG Research, Nicolas Rossignol, DG Enterprise and Industry, and once again Christian Siebert, DG Enterprise and Industry DG[9].

In 2007, the annual meeting was renamed EuropaBio's "Open Day" and this time the keynote speaker was none other than the EU's Trade Commissioner, Peter Mandelson, making his first major speech on trade and biotechnology as Commissioner. Although he told the biotech industry that consumer concerns should not be dismissed he ignored the fact that GM crops are only grown in a handful of countries and concluded that "*we must be under no illusion that Europe's interests are served by being outside a global market that is steadily working its way through the issues raised by GM food. They are not*". Also speaking was the Commission Policy Coordinator for its Mid-Term Review, Julien Mousnier[10].

Attracting senior members of the Commission to industry events has paid dividends, not only in terms of pro-biotech Commission policies but also in PR terms. The speeches from supportive Commissioners have made the

[8] http://www.europabio.org/EBioNews/issue_6.htm

[9] http://www.swedenbio.com/templates/NewsPage.aspx?id=1853

[10] http://www.europabio.org/OpenDay/open_day.htm

news. Headlines such as "*Mandelson urges EU to speed GM food approvals*"[11] or "*Stand by science on GMO foods, EU trade chief says*" [12] would have been unlikely to get press coverage if industry alone was making these statements.

EuropaBio even boasts of its achievements: "*Hardly a day goes by without EuropaBio messages being featured in the press commenting on important issues impacting the industry. More than 350 articles have reached millions of readers and online visits to the EuropaBio web site have jumped to 1000 unique visitors a day – making it one of the most widely visited European trade association web sites*"[13].

By throwing its weight behind the biotech industry the European Commission has given further impetus and importance to an industry that in some sectors, notably food and agriculture, has failed to deliver in Europe.

[11] http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/a0827432-1ade-11dc-8bf0-000b5df10621,dwp_uuid=34c8a8a6-2f7b-11da-8b51-00000e2511c8.html

[12] Reuters - Thu Jun 14, 2007 5:29pm ET

[13] EuropaBio 2007 annual review

Naked ambition: The biotech industry and DG Enterprise

DG Enterprise and Industry is arguably the most powerful DG in the Commission. Its Commissioner Günter Verheugen is reputably the right hand man of Commission President José Manuel Barroso himself. It is therefore no surprise that the biotech industry has targeted this DG and made it one of its most loyal supporters in the Commission. The relationship works two ways and whilst EuropaBio and the biotech companies provide the information, the DG provides the publicity through high level (and pro-GMO) speeches and policies (see mid-term review, chapter 8).

High Level biotech group

As part of the EU's biotechnology strategy of 2002 DG Enterprise established a high level working group on biotechnology – the Competitiveness in Biotechnology Group (CBAG). It is made up of EuropaBio, the main biotech companies and a few academics[14]. Initially DG Enterprise fought to keep its membership secret but following persistence by Friends of the Earth Europe and the looming threat of legal action, the Secretary General of the Commission had to disclose the names of it participants (see table 1).

Table 1: Members of the Competitiveness in Biotechnology Advisory Group (CBAG) (updated in January 2006):

Dr. Alessandro Sidoli	Axxam
Dr. Hans Kast	BASF Plant Science
Dr. Bernward Garthoff	Bayer Cropscience AG
Prof. Dr. Horst Domdey	Biom
Prof. Hans Dons	Bioseeds
Mr. Mats Pettersson	Biovitrum AB
Prof. Emilio Munoz Ruiz	Scientific Advisory Group, CSIC
Mr. Feike Sijbesma	DSM NV
Dr. Johan Vanhemelrijck	Europabio
Dr. Karsten Henco	Evotec Oai AG
Dr. Markku Jalkanen	Faron Pharmaceuticals
Mr. Jo Bury	Flanders Interuniversity Institute for Biotechnology
Dr. Erik Tambuyzer	Genzyme Europe

According to DG Enterprise, the members of CBAG are too busy to actually meet and there are therefore no minutes available to the public. However, CBAG is closely involved in developing the EU biotech strategy. It has produced a number of reports that generally call for more resources for the industry and castigates opposition to GM foods and crops by the European public and a number of member states[15].

"It has not been easy to organise meetings as the members' agendas are heavily charged, but the group has twice provided extensive reports with their views on public biotech policy and their proposals. For this reason, there are no meeting minutes that I can transmit".

Email to Friends of the Earth Europe from DG Enterprise and Industry, 14 November 2007

[14] http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/phabiocom/docs/cbag_members_20060106.pdf

[15] http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/phabiocom/comp_biotech_networks_adv_gr.htm

Commissioner Verheugen ready to serve

As a result of the close relationship between the biotech industry and DG Enterprise, its Commissioner, Günter Verheugen, has been at the forefront of promoting the industry. His press releases and speeches talk of "*unleashing the enormous potential*" of the biotech industry, its ability to provide "*new solutions for sustainable agriculture*" and how it will become a "*driving force*" in our knowledge-based economy. Box 2. details some extracts of these speeches and press releases.

Unfortunately for Mr. Verheugen, much of what he has been advised to say does not stand up to scrutiny. For example, his claim in 2005 that biotechnology will create more jobs and boost economic was undermined by his later admission that no data on employment in the sector exists[16]. Likewise his claims that biotechnology will lead to better crop yields, better food and feed quality, and crops resistant to heat and salt have been undermined by the industry's inability to deliver on any of these claims.

Box 2. Extracts from Commissioner Verheugen's speeches and press releases

Speech: Biotech's contribution to an innovative Europe, Industry conference European Track, Lyon, April 14th 2005[17]. The biotechnology sector "*can become the backbone of a knowledge-based economy and a significant driver of Europe's economic recovery*" "*We want it, we need it, we support it, as the backbone of industry in Europe*".

The Commission's new Biotech Policy. EuropaBio's Biotechnology Policy Day High Level Roundtable, 22 September 2005: "*we, the Commission, public authorities, academia and industry together, should try to present the usefulness of GMOs to the public and explain why it matters greatly to us, not only as food and feed*"[18].

Commission launches 'A new industrial policy: creating the conditions for manufacturing to thrive',5 October 2005: The Mid-term review of the biotechnology strategy will *"involve closer cooperation with industry through the Competitiveness in Biotechnology Advisory Group and a regular annual triangular dialogue with industry and Member states in order to help identify problems, propose priorities, and make recommendations for actions*" [19].

Press release 'Biotech: Unleashing the enormous potential' 21 *October 2005: "This Commission has made biotechnology a high political priority. If used properly, it has the potential to become a driving force in our knowledge-based economy*"[20].

Press release 'Life Sciences and Biotechnology – A strategy for Europe', October 2005: Biotechnology *"plays an important role in making plants resistant to heat, salt and parasites*"[21].

Press release 'EU puts emphasis on innovation in the field of biotechnology' 11th April 2007 announcing the conclusions of the Mid-term review: *"Biotechnology is an important means to promote growth, jobs and competitiveness in the EU. The use of biotechnology is however not without controversy and the enhanced use of biotechnology needs to be accompanied by a broad societal debate about the potential risks and benefits of biotechnology including its ethical dimension."*[22]

[16] http://www.foeeurope.org/publications/2007/FoEE_biotech_MTR_midlifecrisis_March07.pdf

[17] http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/05/226&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en

[18] http://europa.eu.int/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/05/536&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en

[19] http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/enterprise_policy/industry/index_en.htm

[20] http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/05/1324&type=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en

[21] http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=MEMO/05/389&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=fr

[22] http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/07/484

Money for nothing? The biotech industry and DG Research

The other major industry ally is DG Research, a long time supporter of biotechnology. It's current Commissioner, Janez Potocnik, has followed his predecessors in becoming a strong advocate of the industry – he was described as "*Gung-ho*" in favour of biotechnology at a recent EuropaBio meeting[23]. He replaced Philippe Busquin in 2004 who, according to EuropaBio, was the most ardent biotech supporter in the previous Commission[24]. Indeed, EuropaBio is currently involved in over 10 biotech research projects funded by DG Research.

DG Research is an important target for the biotech industry with its massive research budget and sympathetic ear. Running from 2007 to 2013, the current research programme has a budget of 53.2 billion Euros, the largest funding allocation yet for such programmes.

The financial support given to GM foods and crops by DG research started over 20 years ago with the Biomolecular Engineering Programme (BEP) in 1982. Successive EC Framework Programmes have supported research into agricultural biotechnology with around 353 million Euros[25]. This does not include funding for biofuels, and does not include national spending, for example the UK and Germany alone spent €47 million and €61 million respectively in 2001[26]. Table 2. lists some examples of agricultural biotechnology projects funded by DG Research.

Table 2. Examples of agricultural biotech projects funded by DG Research

Project name	Funding (Euro)	Description
CO-EXTRA	13.5 million	Project on the 'coexistence' of genetically modified, conventional and organic crops
NOFORISK	2.5 million	Project that looks at the safety, nutritional properties and efficacy of 'second generation' GMOs in food. Here public funding is being used for applications that will be developed and commercialised by the biotech industry
TRANSCONTAINER	4.17 million	A controversial project developing "efficient and stable" biological containment systems for genetically modified plants
GMO-COMPASS	460 000	A 2 year 'information' project working essentially via a website. Publishes mainly pro-GMO articles and views
SIGMEA	4.5 million	A project looking at "the sustainable introduction of GMOs into the EU" Little information available

The EU's research projects are called Framework Research Programmes, which are managed by DG Research. Under the sixth Framework (FP6), over 2.5 billion Euros were committed for "life sciences, genomics and biotechnology for health". 753 million Euros were allocated to "Food quality and safety, and a further 247 million Euros to citizens and governance in a knowledge-based society. Table 3 lists FP6 projects directly involving EuropaBio.

[23] http://www.biolifetv.com/?page=video&video_id=81

[24] http://www.nature.com/nbt/journal/v22/n10/full/nbt1004-1199.html

[25] http://www.foeeurope.org/publications/2007/FoEE_biotech_MTR_midlifecrisis_March07.pdf

[26] Personal communication with Bernard Zechendorf, DG Research

Table 3: FP6 projects directly involving EuropaBio

Project Name	Funding (Euro)	Description
TP PLANTS AND HEALTH	555 840	Technology platform on plant genomics and biotechnology (see below)
CONSUMERCHOICE	707 752	Do European consumers buy GMO foods? Industry-led market research-style project aimed at questioning public opposition to GM foods
WHITE BIOTECH TP	500 200	A European technology platform on industrial biotechnology coordinated by EuropaBio
FROM GMP TO GBP	417 018	Fostering bioethics practices (GBP) among the European biotechnology Industry
NANOBIO-RAISE	553 854	Nanobiotechnology: Responsible Action on Issues in Society and Ethics
BIOREFINERY EUROVIEW	436 078	Current situation and potential of the bio-refinery concept in the EU: strategic framework and guidelines for its development
YIC STATUS	339 110	Realisation of Young Innovative Company Status, YIC, for biotech companies
ORPHANPLATFORM	400 000	Platform of information services for the coordination of rare disease research with various stakeholders from research, SMEs and patient organisations and the coordination of early clinical trials
LIFECOMPETENCE	743 000	Life Science Competence in Europe
MATCH2BIOSME	649 130	Activities to stimulate and enhance innovation and raise the level of competitiveness of the European Biotech industry

Plants for the Future and funding through Framework Programmes

The Sixth Framework Programme also funds Technology Platforms (TPs), which the Commission defines as "*a framework, led by industry, to define research and development priorities, timeframes and action plans on a number of strategically important issues where achieving Europe's future growth, competitiveness and sustainability objectives is dependent upon major research and technological advances in the medium to long term*". TPs must "*play a key role in ensuring an adequate focus of research funding on areas with a high degree of industrial relevance*" and "*address technological challenges that can potentially contribute to a number of key policy objectives which are essential for Europe's future competitiveness*".

The TP involving GM crops is the flagship partnership between DG Research and the biotech industry, called Plants for the Future. Originally recommended by the European Council in March 2003, the Commission asked EuropaBio and the European Plant Science Organisation, a network of research institutes, to develop and set it up.

Since the inauguration of Plants for the Future, the European Commission, and in particular DG Research, has been prominent in supporting it, not only in financial terms but politically – by sending senior representatives to its events and even helping to design the project. At its launch in June 2004 the then Commissioner Philippe Busquin spoke at the press conference and blamed insufficient communication of the benefits of GM crops as one of the reasons for the collapse in public support[27]. Commissioner Potocnik gave the key-note speech at the launch in July 2005 of the 'Stakeholders Proposal for a Strategic Research Agenda (SRA)' and his Deputy Head of Cabinet, Kurt Vandenberghe spoke at the launch of the SRA itself in June 2007.

[27] http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/04/801&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en

The Plants for the Future TP was also quick to lobby DG Research in 2004 and ensured that biotechnology, and in particular GM crops, was given a high priority in the next round of research funding, the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7)[28]. Kurt Vandenberghe even claimes that this success was due to successful industry lobbying "[Plants for the future] *have already succeeded in ensuring that plant sciences are given a high priority under the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7)*"[29].

This seems to have been confirmed by EuropaBio which claimed that the success was "*the culmination of a 2 year long lobbying campaign by EuropaBio to make FP7 more useable, and accessible to biotech companies. Major funds are now allocated for health-care, agriculture, the knowledge-based bioeconomy*"[30]. As a result 1.9 billion Euros worth of funding will be available under the theme 'Food, Agriculture and Fisheries, and Biotechnology' with the primary aim of building a European Knowledge Based Bio-economy (KBBE). One of the three major activities will be 'life sciences, biotechnology and biochemistry for sustainable non-food products and processes', in other words agrofuels. This huge amount of money is additional to research funding already given to the industry at the National level.

Research Commissioner Janez Potocnik was also right on message when he said: *"Life sciences and biotechnologies are playing a vital role for the competitiveness of our industry but I see it also playing an important role in facing challenges such as the perils of oil dependence, global warming, food security and population health. The FP7 has been designed to address these challenges and to support the development of a European Knowledge Based Bio-Economy, that among others will play a crucial role for achieving the EU goal of reaching the minimum level of 10% biofuels for vehicle fuel by 2020"*[31].

Whether as a direct result of the industry lobbying or its close relationship between industry and DG Research, there has been no attempt to prioritise research into addressing global and European problems such as the exhaustion of natural resources, biodiversity declines or into any of the alternatives to GM crops. A request for a Technical Platform on organic food and farming under FP6 was refused even though there is growing evidence that it is more competitive than GM farming[32].

The rationale for giving a dominant role to GM food and crops in the Framework Programmes seems to be to create wealth by being the first to reach a global market with new products. Indeed, this is the rationale behind agricultural research generally. Analysis by the European Science Social Forum Network reports that 30 per cent of FP6 budget has been used to subsidise the biotech industry, with half of it going to large biotech companies, whilst wider societal questions and needs have been ignored[33]. With the biotech industry enjoying such a close relationship with DG Research, the flow of money looks likely to continue.

[28] http://www.epsoweb.org/catalog/tp/TP_FP7_1.PDF
[29] http://cordis.europa.eu/fetch?CALLER=FP6_NEWS_FOOD&ACTION=D&DOC=13&CAT=NEWS&QUERY=1192654005957&RCN=27926
[30] EuropaBio Annual Report 2007
[31] http://ec.europa.eu/research/index.cfm?pg=newsalert&lg=en&year=2007&na=na-110407
[32] http://www.foeeurope.org/publications/2007/FoEE_biotech_MTR_midlifecrisis_March07.pdf
[33] www.essfnetwork.org/documents/ESSF_brochure.doc

The European Commission's Joint Research Centre and the BIO4EU study: Poor quality and biased

As well as for DG Research, Commissioner Potocnik is also responsible for a DG called the Joint Research Centre (JRC). Born out of the EU's nuclear programme in the 1950's the JRC is now the 'reference centre' for science and technology in the EU. It is divided up into different sections, and it is the Institute for Prospective Technological Studies (IPTS) that has focussed on GMOs.

In 2006/7 the JRC/IPTS carried out a cost-benefit analysis of biotechnology called BIO4EU[34]. The study was requested by the European Parliament's Budgets Committee in order to get reliable data on jobs created and benefits gained to support the EU's bioeconomy vision, and to get an overview of both the challenges and the potential of modern biotechnology in the EU. The study was also used for the mid-term review of the Commission's biotech strategy (see below).

Inbuilt bias

Many of the assumptions and contradictions, inherent to the study's construction, raise suspicion over the validity of its claims and its independence. The main assumption throughout the study's outline and related documents was that modern biotechnology has enormous benefits to offer, although no evidence was provided to sustain such a claim. The JRC claimed that biotechnology will be the "*key enabling technology of the 21st century*", and that it "*could consequently serve as a major contributor in achieving EU policy goals on economic growth and job creation, public health, environmental protection and sustainable development*". Moreover, when the study outline identified weaknesses, it failed to provide any explanation or suggest further analysis.

The "*impact indicators*" (used to gauge the impacts of various aspects of modern biotechnology) used for the study were very limited. There was no mention of impact on biodiversity, and no consideration of GM contamination of conventional and organic crops, despite the significant costs this has already incurred[35]. The "*public acceptability*" of GMOs was placed under the heading of "*barriers*", suggesting a strong pro-GM bias. Moreover, some of the figures used in the analysis were taken from the ISAAA - an organisation funded by the GM industry that has been heavily criticised regarding the accuracy of its figures for the areas of GM crops grown worldwide, including allegations of inflation of figures for South Africa, India and the USA.[36] The study also failed to give a full consideration to the alternatives to modern biotechnology, such as organic farming, and the contribution these alternatives could make to reaching policy goals.

Comparing the incomparable[37]

When the JRC published the results of the BIO4EU study, it announced that 1.43-1.69 per cent of current EU GVA (Gross Value Added) is contributed by modern biotechnology. Whilst this figure doe not sound significant, the JRC claims that it is equivalent to the contribution of the EU's entire agriculture or chemical sectors. However, there are two major problems with this analysis and comparison:

- The figures on biotechnology were reached by adding all "downstream products" of biotechnology (such as milk, meat and egg products from GM-fed animlas). As pointed out by BioScience Resource in a commentary on the BIO4EU study (http://www.bioscienceresource.org/commentaries/brc5.php), "*if a bull was created using embryo transfer (ET), then all the meat and all the milk produced by all the cows inseminated by that bull were counted as GVA attributable to modern biotechnology. The figure of 1.43%-1.69% is therefore effectively an exaggeration. That this is so can be gauged from independent but related figures, including the fact that the agricultural industry in the EU employed approximately 7.4 million people (in 1997, before EU enlargement), which is hundreds of times more than the modern biotechnology industry*".

[34] http://bio4eu.jrc.es

[35] For details of GM contamination incidents to date see www.gmcontaminationregister.org

[36] http://www.foei.org/en/publications/pdfs/gmcrops2007execsummary.pdf

[37] With thanks to BioScience Resource, based on the commentary "Does the Knowledge-Based Bio-Economy Add Up?" Full article can be read at www.bioscienceresource.org

- The downstream products of the agriculture and chemical sectors where not taken into account when using their GVA to conclude that the contribution of modern biotechnology is comparable to both sectors.

Furthermore, the list of applications of modern biotechnology used in agriculture in the EU today have limited use and so does not support the JRC's conclusion that biotechnology is capable of forming a future agricultural revolution.

When looking at the possible socioeconomic contributions of biotechnology to agriculture, the JRC explored potential positive contributions in detail whilst potential negative contributions are sidelined or ignored. Despite the fact that the European Parliament requested that the JRC examine the challenges as well as the potential of biotechnology, there is no specific section for challenges which remain scattered throughout the text without any in depth analysis.

A number of the applications listed by the JRC as emerging technologies for agriculture and primary production do not in fact have any link with farming (including sports animals, pets, endangered species and xenotransplants). The study's promotion of the use of GM crops for agrofuels takes no account of the considerable complexities, if not fatal constraints, on agrofuels, such as land availability, conversion efficiency, effects on food prices and dependence on technology promises that may never materialise.

In its rather desperate attempt to find positive economic contributions to the EU economy, the JRC even went as far as to place GMO detection (for the purpose of labelling) as an important economic opportunity. Aside from the fact that it is hard to see the GMO detection industry ever becoming a dominant force in the EU economy, GMO detection is seen by most of industry and most consumers (although for different reasons) purely as a burden. Including GMO detection in a list of economic benefits is no different to arguing that crime has benefits since it boosts the economy by increasing the need for police officers and prisons.

Unsurprisingly, the biotech industry responded positively to the JRC's work, issuing a press release the day before the results were published claiming that the report showed the "*pervasiveness of biotechnology across all major economic sectors in Europe*"[38].

The sloppiness and bias of this major piece of research which could, according to the Commission, become an annual study to track biotechnology in Europe is another indication of how the Commission's services are tuned in to the interests of the biotechnology industry. That this bias touches their scientific services is all the more worrying as it is a clear manipulation of an area that should be independent of economic interests.

[38] http://www.europabio.org/articles/PR_JRC_200407.pdf

Privileged access

In October 2007, Commissioners Potocnik (DG Research) and Verheugen (DG Enterprise) again met the biotech industry at the EuropaBio offices. Getting a meeting with a Commissioner is usually difficult given their busy schedules. To get two Commissioners on the same day shows just how much Commission support there is for biotechnology. This is not an isolated case, earlier in this report we have shown how many times Potocnik and Verheugen have met with groups such as EuropaBio, whether in private meetings or as speakers at industry events. EuropaBio were obviously "*delighted to welcome*" the two Commissioners and announced their usual message of saying how Europe's biotech industry *"can help stimulate growth and create jobs across Europe".*[39]

The EuropaBio Board also met in 2006 with Commission President José Manuel Barroso to apparently underline how the industry – "*being an unequivocal cornerstone of the knowledge based bio-economy*" – is committed to achieving this. According to EuropaBio, Barroso acknowledged the importance of biotechnology as a key technology in the EU's innovation strategy and stated that it was needed to fulfil the EU's Lisbon targets.[40]

The list of industry events that the Commission attends is long and provides no secrets as to the time that the European Commission is prepared to spend with industry – which far outweighs any time spent with the NGOs or the organic farming sector. Table 4. shows a list of some of the meetings where GMOs were on the agenda.

Table 4. A selection of European Commission attendances at industry functions

Date	Event	Commission representatives attending
April 2005	EuropaBio Breakfast meeting	Christian Siebert, Head of Unit, DG Enterprise
April 2005	Biovision Industry conference, Lyon	Janez Potocnik, (Science & Research Commissioner), Commission Vice President Günter Verheugen, Mariann Fischer Boel (Agriculture Commissioner), Chris Patermann, Director, Philippe de Taxis du Poët, DG Research, Christian Siebert, DG Enterprise
May 2005	EuropaBio Breakfast meeting	Georgette Lalis, Director, DG Enterprise.
Oct 2005	EuropaBio Policy Day	Janez Potocnik, Commissioner for Science & Research and Commission Vice President Verheugen
Feb 2006	EuropaBio Breakfast meeting	Philippe Brunet, Deputy Head of Cabinet, DG Health and Consumer Protection
April 2006	BIO industry conference, USA	Big EC delegation including Christian Patermann, Director, DG Research and 4 Commission officials talking on GM foods and crops
Oct 2006	EuropaBio Brussels day	Thibaut Kleiner, DG Competition, Stéphane Hogan, DG Research, Nicolas Rossignol, DG Enterprise, Christian Siebert, DG Enterprise
March 2007	Europabio workshop on the low level presence of GM in traded commodities	Cabinet member, DG Trade
May 2007	BIO industry conference, USA	Big EC delegation including Christian Patermann, Director, DG Research, John Bruton, EC Ambassador in the USA, and the Secretariat Generals policy coordinator, Julien Mousnier.
June 2007	EuropaBio Open Day Commissioner	Peter Mandelson, Julien Mousnier, Mid-Term Review Policy Coordinator
June 2007	Launch of industry's Strategic Research Agenda " Plants for the future", Brussels	Kurt Vandenberghe, Deputy Head of Cabinet Potocnik
Sept 2007	13th European Congress on Biotechnology, Barcelona	Janez Potocnik, Commissioner for Science & Research, Dr. Alfredo Aguilar,
Oct 2007	Biotechnica industry conference, Hannover	Dr. Alfredo Aguilar, Head of Unit, DG Research
Oct 2007	EuropaBio Biotech Policy Day, Brussels	Janez Potocnik, Commissioner for Science & Research, Commission Vice President Günter Verheugen[41]

[39] http://www.europabio.org/articles/PressStatement_EuropaBioPolicyDay_151007.pdf

[40] http://www.europabio.org/documents/AnnualReport2007.pdf

[41] http://www.europabio.org/articles/PressStatement_EuropaBioPolicyDay_151007.pdf

How it works in practice: Influencing EU policy

Political mindset at the European Commission

Biotechnology has been placed as a priority sector in the Commission's industry policy[42] and as a main technology to develop in order to reach the EU's Knowledge Based Bio-Economy (KBBE)[43]. It is interesting to note that in this market-based approach – i.e.'let the market decide' –the European market (European consumers) has indeed rejected GM foods. This is however conveniently ignored. Moreover, clear strategies are worked on between industry, the Commission and national Governments to sell GMOs to Europeans and to boost industry profits. This is of course not expressed so blatantly, but rather presented as helping "European competitiveness" and creating "European jobs".

However, as industry and government's own figures indicate, the sector is not living up to expectations and is consequently failing to deliver on the Lisbon competitiveness Agenda. Concerned at the apparent contradiction between political and financial support given to agricultural biotechnology and the sector's performance, Friends of the Earth Europe studied the figures and published a report in March 2007[44]. This study concluded that whilst there have been great expectations of agricultural biotechnology, there have been even greater disappointments. Indeed, the EU policy goals of sustainable farming, rural development and job creation are being better met by agri-environmental farming such as organic. However, there is little political space for such analysis at the European Commission.

The EU's Biotech Strategy

The EU's Biotechnology Strategy, which was agreed in 2002 for a period of 8 years, was subject to a mid-term review in 2006/7. Reviews are often planned into European policies or laws to take stock of what has or has not been achieved half way through its period. This would be a good idea were it not for the influence that powerful lobby groups can exercise on the outcomes and in setting new targets for such reviews.

For example, EuropaBio announced that because of the review of the EU strategy, 2006 would be "*an important year for biotechnology in Europe".* In a letter to the European Commission, the lobby group stated "*Biotechnologies are clearly identified in a series of policy objectives set in place by the EU institutions and for the agricultural and forest sectors, both heavily dependent on plant science research and development. Plant biotechnology, together with the industrial biotechnology sector, will be key in achieving the "knowledge based bio-economy*".

Indeed, the 2002 Strategy focuses very much on industry competitiveness and what is needed to increase Europe's economic performance in relation to its main competitors, currently judged to be the US. The strategy sets out 30 action points, which roughly grouped, set targets for jobs and education; research, including intellectual property rights (IPRs); finance; communication and networking; governance; implementation of legislation; and development. On GM food and crops, the strategy makes unsupported statements on "*improved food quality*" and "*environmental benefits*". The Strategy promotes biotechnology as a "*frontier*" technology that can provide a "*major contribution*" to reaching the EU Lisbon Agenda goals of competitiveness and job creation. It threatens Europe with being left behind unless it whole-heartedly adopts this new technology. Public concern over GMOs has "*stifled our competitive position, weakened our research capability, and could limit our policy options in the longer term*"[45].

[42] http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/05/1324&type=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en

[43] According to DG research: "The term "bio-economy" includes all industries and economic sectors that produce, manage and otherwise exploit biological resources (e.g. agriculture, food, forestry, fisheries and other bio-based industries). European bio-economy cannot compete on a global level by delivering only basic agricultural commodities" the way to make the KBBE work is for "Policy-makers, governments, industry, public and private research bodies, civil society to recognise that life science and biotechnology potential has to be carefully nurtured if it is to continue to grow

[44] http://www.foeeurope.org/publications/2007/FoEE_biotech_MTR_midlifecrisis_March07.pdf

[45] http://ec.europa.eu/biotechnology/pdf/com2002-27_en.pdf

The review process included

- Inputs from a network of Member States, the Commission and industry
- A study conducted by DG Research's Joint Research Centre (JRC) looking at the cost-benefit analysis of biotechnology in the European Union
- An assessment (Communication) by the European Commission of the progress achieved since 2002 put to Member States for approval

The triangular meetings

The informal network that exists between member states, the Commission and the industry is worth looking at more closely. It is made up of the largely pro-GMO economy or industry ministries of national member states, DG Enterprise and Industry, and the biotechnology industry.

The network focussed specifically on the mid term review, with a series of meetings and working groups. In June 2006, a high level meeting co-organised by the outgoing EU Austrian Presidency, the incoming Finnish Presidency and DG Enterprise and Industry, was held in Helsinki to formulate recommendations for the mid term review. The network had four working groups to feed into the mid-term review: Regulatory, Bioeconomy, Finance and Communications groups. Whilst these cover a number of important issues, the work of the network was not considered relevant for wider stakeholder input and consultation. Friends of the Earth was wrongly told that the meeting was full when attempts were made to register, and Friends of the Earth Finland was subsequently barred entry to the meeting.

Industry on the other hand, was very welcome at the event. A leaked email received by Friends of the Earth Europe shows EuropaBio forwarding the invitation from the Finnish and Austrian Presidencies to their partners and members. In their email, EuropaBio encouraged its members to attend so that they can "*meet EU decision makers and representatives of national ministries to get your views across*." Furthermore, "*Company CEOs and executives who attend can expect to meet decision makers and network with other industry players*".

After the meeting, the EuropaBio News webpage announced "*EuropaBio sets the standards for an efficient Biotechnology strategy*" and stating that "*there seems to be a commitment emerging from Member States' Ministries to more publicly support the GM regulations against groups that are negatively campaigning against GMOs*"[46].

In a further example of the privileged access given to the biotech industry, EuropaBio took part in the Member States' communication group to "*tackle this issue*", supported the UK and Finland in managing the Regulatory and Bioeconomy groups and, astoundingly, co-chaired the Finance group with Austria [47].

Friends of the Earth's protests against being banned from the meeting led to the Secretariat General announcing a public consultation over email. Just how open the Commission and the Finnish Presidency were to input other than from industry is however still up for question. Following pressure from NGOs, the presentations from the working groups were posted on the internet. However, Friends of the Earth managed to obtain handouts from the meeting which showed that only part of the information presented at the conference had been posted, whilst key recommendations were kept out of the public domain:

EuropaBio on the other hand announced on its website that "*EuropaBio has set up a working group devoted to the Mid-Term Policy Review process and that has been active in helping the EU Commission gain accurate and reliable data for the review*."

[46] http://www.europabio.org/EBioNews/issue_14.htm

[47] http://www.europabio.org/EBioNews/issue_10.htm

The European Parliament and the mid-term review

While the Commission, industry and member states were revising the EU's biotechnology policy, a Member of the European Parliament's Agriculture Committee, Kyösti Virrankoski, issued a report entitled 'Biotechnology: Prospects and Challenges for Agriculture in Europe'

The report, written in very pro-GMO language, ignored the debate over scientific uncertainty, public opinion and data other than from pro-GM sources. It also criticised the EU's GMO approval process. As well as the shockingly biased language of the report, there were a number of other surprising elements.

In Parliament jargon, the report was an 'Own Initiative Resolution', that is a personal initiative taken by Mr Virrankoski, and taken before the Commission sent its proposals for the revised EU Biotech Strategy to the European Parliament and Member States for comment and validation. Equally strangely, when one checks Mr Virrankoski's input to the work of the European Parliament, there have been no previous reports, statements or even written questions on GM food and crops. A meeting held between Mr Virrankoski and Friends of the Earth Europe raised strong suspicions as to the extent of his, or even his party's policy officer's, knowledge of GM food and crop issues, suggesting this was more an industry initiative than Mr Virrankoski's own.

Furthermore, articles were published at the same time in the European and specialised press stating how the European Parliament was about to change its position and embrace GMOs. It is surprising that stories based on one MEP's initiative, and before any vote had been taken, made it into the press. This raises questions about who was working behind the scenes to get such coverage.

In a telephone conversation with Friends of the Earth Europe, the Commission (Secretariat General) confirmed that they were watching the European Parliament closely to see what would be adopted and how this would be taken into account for the review process.

Predictably the biotech industry welcomed the report saying that it described well the situation facing agricultural biotechnology and criticised some MEPs for trying to amend it[48].

The "Virrankoski Resolution" was presented to the Agriculture Committee and submitted for amendments and a vote. An astonishing 190 amendments were submitted to the 6 page report, reflecting the amount of concern raised at the biased approach and highly questionable statements written by Virrankoski. The report created considerable controversy amongst and within political groups in Brussels in the run up to a vote by the whole Parliament. Despite reports of key biotech corporations visiting MEPs that were opposed to the report, Mr Virrankoski eventually recognised that he didn't have support for his position, and to avoid an embarrassing rejection by Parliament withdrew the report before the vote.

When the European Commission later published its recommendations for the revised Biotech Strategy, only European Parliament's "support of biotechnology" was mentioned – there was no reference whatsoever to its lack of agreement over GM food and crops for Europe.[49].

[48] http://www.europabio.org/ISAAApress%20lunch/EuropaBio%20position%20statement%20on%20amendments2.pdf

[49] "The European Council and the European Parliament have recognised the importance of life sciences and biotechnology," on page 2 of Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the mid term review of the strategy on Life Sciences and Biotechnology, COM(2007)175final

The outcome of the mid-term review

In April 2007, the Commission issued its proposals for the Biotech Strategy Review which were accepted by EU Competitiveness Ministers[50]. Whilst acknowledging the poor performance of the GM crop sector and its widespread public opposition, the mid term review towed the industry line and called for increased financial and political support for biotechnology applications – including for GM crops. Some of the main points of the Review were:

a) GMOs are Green: The review promotes the 'green' potential of GMOs. It claims that GMOs can reduce pesticide use and that they will be used for agrofuels. This completely bypasses all the controversy on whether herbicide-resistant crops do in fact reduce chemical inputs and whether agrofuels are sustainable or not.

b) The EU will have more GMOs including GM biofuels on the market in years to come: The Review notes that the industry had applied to approve a further 40 GMOs in Europe, including for cultivation, and notes that *"GM technology is likely to have in the future more application in the field of industrial processes. For example, sectors such as the production of biofuels or paper will have an interest in higher yielding plants*".

c) The debate on GMOs should continue, but as long as this doesn't stop them being approved for the EU market: "*There is a strong need for an assessment of the benefits and risks of the use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in all sectors, taking into account their environmental and health effects as well as their acceptance in EU society. However, the approval of GMOs should continue to be based on a case by case risk analysis*".

d) Strict laws, but not too strict: *"Improve the implementation of the legislation and its impact on competitiveness. The EU has probably the most developed, and sometimes most stringent, legal framework on life sciences and biotechnology. Nonetheless, stringent rules should not hinder competitiveness and innovation".*

e) The public would support GMOs if they were…organic? The Review refers to public opposition to GM crops, and that the uptake of any technology needs public support. It bases its analysis of public opinion on the most recent EU opinion poll dating from 2005 when European's were asked about their views on biotechnology[51]. On possible acceptance of GM foods, the Review chooses to quote from the opinion poll: "It should be noted that 50% or more say they would buy GM food if it were healthier, if it were to contain less pesticide residues, or if were to be more environmentally friendly." It should be pointed out to the European Commission, Ministers in charge of competitiveness, and their friends in the biotech industry lobby that this kind of food exists already: organic food.

Industry response to the Review

Unsurprisingly, EuropaBio welcomed the mid-term Review, particularly commenting on the increased financing and the "better regulation" initiatives. They attacked those Member States who raise scientific objections and listen to public opposition to GMOs and thus do not support market approvals calling on them to implement the strategy "*without a biased pick and choose approach*"[52].

At EuropaBio 's annual Open Day in June 2007, a panel discussion was held on the mid term review and its outcomes. In the discussion, the facilitator announced that Commissioners Mandelson, Verheugen and Potocnik were all "*gung-ho*" in favour of biotechnology including GM crops[53]. The European Commission's policy officer, who coordinated the Review process and paper, and was one of the panellists, promoted the Review to EuropaBio members and the press as a "*refocused action plan to promote the sector*".

EuropaBio and the European Commission are now working together to implement the revised strategy.

[50] http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=MEMO/07/130&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=fr

[51] http://www.ec.europa.eu/research/press/2006/pdf/pr1906_eb_64_3_final_report-may2006_en.pdf

[52] http://www.europabio.org/eu_strategy.htm

[53] http://www.biolifetv.com/?page=video&video_id=81

Building myths

The biotech industry has a history of building myths for why we need GM foods or crops. In the late 1990's it promoted biotechnology as a way to feed the world and in more recent years it has argued that we need GM foods to make the EU economy competitive. As each of these arguments fail to stand the test of time the industry starts concocting its next public relations and political push.

Myth I: Why GMOs are needed to save our farm animals

Currently the industry is building political momentum to speed up the approval process for new GM animal feeds. Its argument is that GM feeds are being authorised and grown in the United States but because they are not approved in the EU then this disrupts trade leading to a shortage of animal feed. According to EuropaBio the solution is to speed up the approvals process in the EU and to allow low levels of GM contamination from products not approved in the EU.

Whether by coincidence or not, whilst the industry pushed to speed up approvals, DG Agriculture in the European Commission published an internal report about the effects of the non-approval of GM feeds on trade and the livestock sector [54]. The report acknowledged that for crops such as maize there would be no economic impact if Europe did not approve all GM varieties being grown in the US. For soy, which is imported on a larger scale than maize, the Commission report drew up various scenarios and unsurprisingly emphasised the worse case possible. Interestingly, the conclusions of the Commission report followed closely that of the industry's position and raised the issue of speeding up approvals and dealing with contamination incidents. A few weeks after its publication EuropaBio together with the feed and cereal lobby groups publicised their report calling for the same actions.

If the issues were not so serious, the industry's arguments would be laughable; that if the EU does not approve GM feeds more quickly, there will be a shortage of animal feed and "*the ability of the EU livestock producers to feed their animals and hence the welfare of these animals is at stake, and would result in a dramatic reduction of the livestock population in the EU*"[55]. EuropaBio was also quoted in a journal as saying that if a solution is not found "*European farmer will be forced into wholesale slaughter of their livestock rather than have the animals starve…*"[56].

In addition to this scare-mongering Europabio's claims that there will be a significant number of job losses and an increase to the price consumers have to pay for meat products. To give the issue a bit more urgency EuropaBio called the DG Agriculture report a "time bomb". The feed industry accused the EU of "*strangling*" and "*crippling*" the EU's livestock industry[57].

However, the DG Agriculture report focussed on the worse-case scenario that all major soy exporters move to growing varieties not approved in the EU. Considering the size of the European market, it could be strongly argued that this is very unlikely to happen. Instead the EU could put pressure on those countries and companies exporting animal feed to maintain non-GM supplies.

In addition, the industry's arguments overly-simplify the real market situation and the competitiveness of the constantly changing commodity markets, including soy. For example, US exports to the EU have been declining for over 10 years not because of a lack of GMO approvals in the EU but, according to the Commission, because of "*a decline of competitiveness of US agriculture on the global market…*"[58].

54 http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/envir/gmo/economic_impactGMOs_en.pdf

55 http://www.europabio.org/articles/Final%20Low%20Level%20Presence%20Reference%20and%20Key%20messages.pdf

56 Nature Biotechnology 25, 1065 - 1066 (2007)

57 http://www.fefac.org/file.pdf?FileID=9000

58 http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=MEMO/06/61&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en

Interestingly, during a meeting between the US Government and the EU in February 2007, the US put pressure on the EU on a number of GMO issues, including the speed of the approvals process[59]. However, it was noted that the main products of economic interest for the US was in maize (including seeds), cotton and sugar bee. No mention of soy and the ticking time bomb were recorded[60].

The industry's push, whilst not having an affect yet in policy terms, has been successful in raising the profile and political momentum of the latest myth within the Commission. The Agriculture Commissioner, Mariann Fischer Boel, stated in a speech that the industry's problem was on her "*radar*", and incidentally also questioned the time taken to approve GM feeds [61]. Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson went further and talked in June about "*hungry cows and struggling farmers*" [62].

This support from various Commissioners is no coincidence. EuropaBio's position paper with the feed and cereal industry was planned to be sent to Commissioners well in time for their speeches and a workshop was organised in April aimed at the same Commissioners, Cabinets and member states. The guest speaker for the workshop was Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson's responsible Cabinet member[63].

This example highlights the influence industry has over the Commission's agenda, from raising an issue, briefing officials and eventually creating a problem that the Commission urgently needs to address.

Myth II: Why we need GMOs to make agrofuels

The biotech industry has made no secret of its close relationship with the Commission to influence policy towards increasing the use of agrofuels (also known as biofuels). EuropaBio's secretary general Johan Vanhemelrijck went as far to state that, "*We have worked hard to establish excellent working relations with the Commission and our close involvement with the new Biofuels Technology Platform is one of the fruits of this*"[64].

The Commission's Biofuels Technology Platform aims to provide and implement a common European vision and strategy for the production of biofuels. Many of EuropaBio 's members are involved in the Technology Platform which itself was proposed and developed by a former Commission High Level advisory council that itself involved EuropaBio[65]. The working group recommended that up to 25 per cent of transport fuels should be met by agrofuels by 2030[66]. Not surprisingly the working group also recommended the use of biotechnology to reach that target.

EuropaBio has also brought together several technology platforms, industry, the European Commission and the European Investment Bank for their "Lead Market Initiative" which is aimed at getting new technologies and products on the market as quickly as possible[67].

The issues surrounding the use of crops or trees to produce liquid fuels are complex and unravelling quickly. Rising food prices have been blamed on the increase in demand for agrofuels and there are serious concerns about destroying forests and other important ecosystems to expand the amount of agricultural land available to grow both food and fuel. It is also questionable whether the majority of crops used for agrofuel production actually reduce greenhouse gases, especially when the conversion of habitats into crop land – and the subsequent loss of valuable carbon sinks – is taken into account.

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[59] http://www.foeeurope.org/press/2007/May30_HH_EU_US_docs.htm

[60] http://www.foeeurope.org/GMOs/2007/Annex2_EC_US_WTO_dispute_meeting.pdf

[61] Speech/07/282 Mariann Fischer Boel Prospects for the EU grain and oilseeds sectors Conference by COCERAL European Grain and Oilseed Convention Brussels, 4th May 2007

[62] Speech by Peter Mandelson, at the European Biotechnology Info Day Bavarian Representation, Brussels, 14 June 2007

[63] http://www.europabio.org/EBioNews/issue_21.htm

[64] http://www.europabio.be/articles/PR_BioFuelsTP_060608.doc

[65] Biofuels Research Advisory Council (BIOFRAC)

[66] http://www.biofuelstp.eu/downloads/2061rep.pdf

[67] EuropaBio 2007 Annual review, see also http://errma.com/images/Engl_1_1_._ERRMA_Vortrag_Wittmeyer.doc

Whilst this debate continues the biotech industry appears to be building the next myth – that we need GM technology to save the world from climate change. In its position paper published in June 2007, EuropaBio states that biotechnology is an essential technology to produce biofuel and also claims that "*Biotechnology is today one of the most effective and innovative tools we have to attain European targets for biofuel use, while reducing adverse environmental impacts of transport, and limiting the impact of the increased cultivated land*". It claims this can be done by increasing crop and biomass yields, growing energy crops in "marginal" conditions, developing micro-organisms and enzymes to convert cellulose and convert agricultural wastes (so-called 'second generation' agrofuels technology). However, GM technology has to date failed to deliver on any of those claims[68] and the current use of GM crops for agrofuel production is a coincidence rather than anything else, with agrofuels providing a new market for GM products unwanted by the food industry.

Bayer CropScience held a seminar on agrofuels which, on the subject of GM crops, concluded that "*the use of new technology is vital to improve productivity*" and it is "*easier to sell a non-food GM product compared to a food product*" [69]. However no evidence is provided to show that GM technology has improved productivity and instead this statement reveals the industry's PR strategy – to use the political and public concern over climate change, and the hype around 'second generation' agrofuels to promote its current generation of GM crops for food and feed. This PR spin is also being picked up in the press:

"*They* [unnamed UK Government ministers] *believe the public will now accept that the* [GM] *technology is vital to the development of higher-yield and hardier food for the world's increasing population and will help produce crops that can be used as biofuels in the fight against climate change*"[70].

Considering the industry's past public relations efforts to persuade the public to eat GM foods it is not unreasonable to now question this latest claim; that we need GM crops to save the world from climate change. However, the Commission, once again, seems to be taking the industry's line:

"*It is estimated that the development of biofuels could create a significant number of new jobs throughout the EU and open new markets for agricultural products".* Biofuels are referred to in one of the 5 themes of the revised EU biotechnology strategy: *"Biotechnology in the field of primary production and agro/food has a huge potential for development, in particular the replacement of chemical processes and fossil fuels."*[71]

While the Commission proposes new mandatory targets for increasing the levels of agrofuels, others are becoming more sceptical about whether this can be done sustainably and if it will lead to a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. A report for the OECD Roundtable on Sustainable Development criticised the support given to agrofuels[72] and the UN has also warned that agrofuels could at their worst result in concentration of ownership in agriculture that could "*drive the world's poorest farmers off their land and into deeper poverty*"[73].

[68] http://www.europabio.org/positions/Biofuels_EuropaBio%20position_Final.pdf

[69] http://www.bayercropscience.co.uk/pdfs/report%20of%20Fuel%20from%20our%20Food%20conference.pdf

[70] http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/2007/sep/17/gmcrops.politicalnews1?gusrc=rss&feed=networkfront

[71] Commission staff working document, SEC(2007) 441, Brussels, 10.4.2007

[72] http://www.foeeurope.org/publications/2007/OECD_Biofuels_Cure_Worse_Than_Disease_Sept07.pdf

[73] http://esa.un.org/un-energy/pdf/susdev.Biofuels.FAO.pdf

Conclusions

This report highlights the close working relationship between key parts of the European Commission and the biotechnology industry and questions whether this is in the public interest.

This research is not a comprehensive blow-by-blow record of industry lobbying. It does however offer a brief insight into some of the workings of the biotech industry and how these seemingly influence EU policies. The report focuses mainly on the workings of EuropaBio, the most visible lobby group of the biotech industry and only touches on other pro-biotech lobby groups. It does not investigate the lobbying by individual biotech companies which one must presume is also happening.

This report concludes that:

- Important and powerful parts of the Commission have an extremely close working relationship with lobby groups such as EuropaBio, whereby officials up to the most senior level regularly meet with industry and cooperate on developing the EU's biotech agenda. The relationship between the biotech industry and DG Research and DG Enterprise is particularly close, questioning whether this is any longer in the EU's or public's interest. These Directorates produce biased initiatives and policies that give priority to the GM industry over other more sustainable and economically successful sectors.

- Industry has had privileged access and undue influence over key policy decisions such as the recent mid-term review of the EU's biotechnology strategy,

- The GM industry has for 25 years benefited substantially from the EU's research budget but has produced very little to benefit society or to solve any of its problems. The Commissions support is increasing with biotechnology in food and agriculture a key theme in the new 50 billion euro research programme, FP7.

- There is increasing circumstantial evidence to suspect that some parts of the Commission are allowing industry to dictate policy, thereby overriding safety concerns, public opinion and due democratic processes. In particular, evidence suggests that the recent criticisms by the EU's Agriculture and Trade Commissioners with regard to the EU's approval process are closely linked to industry pushes to highlight these issues.

- Attempts by the Environment Directorate of the Commission to take a precautionary approach to GMOs are inappropriately sidelined by pro-GM Directorates such as DG Research and DG Enterprise.

These findings, whilst perhaps not overly surprising, are important in the wider context of the EU's industrial and agricultural policies. The EU increasingly promotes a neo-liberal and high-tech farming agenda thus marginalizing other food and farming models that show higher potential, are better realised, maintain high public support and provide less risks to the environment or health. This agenda, currently known as the 'Knowledge-Based Bio-Economy' (KBBE), has been developed in conjunction with the biotech industry, who would naturally also benefit from its implementation.

Although biotechnology covers many different applications, the use of genetically modified crops and foods is promoted by the industry within the bio-economy agenda in an attempt to gather political support against a backdrop of widespread and deep consumer rejection. It is claimed that biotechnology, including GM crops and foods, will be a solution for society's problems, notably that the sector will make the EU economically competitive, be good for the environment and feed the world.

This report also reveals that Commission and industry are further aided in pro GM food policies by blatantly manipulated research by a so-called "independent" science arm of the Commission. The research agenda more generally is sold out to the agri-biotech corporate lobby, made obvious by meetings, supportive statements and industry friendly technology platforms from the Commission on one side, and on the other by industry's own admissions of its focused and successful lobbying to get major support for agri-biotech in EU research programmes.

The jobs argument has been sold very cleverly to become now the accepted truth in some political circles. Whilst there is of course nothing to criticise in creating jobs, evidence points to the opposite. However the political mindset is so bought by the biotechnology idea there is no political space currently for such counter-arguments despite industry's own evidence pointing to the poor performance of the GM crop sector.

It should also be noted that EuropaBio presents itself as representing 1800 small and medium enterprises (SMEs). However the GM food and crops sector is dominated by 6 large multinationals, and it is these corporations' interests and the concentration of the seed, chemicals and GM markets, that are being pushed within the Commission-industry relationship.

European citizens should feel confident that the EU decision-making process is transparent and does not allow industry sectors such as the biotech industry privileged access to push through genetically modified foods. The role of lobbyists and the power of corporations is increasingly coming under the spotlight. Building public confidence in the European institutions and decisions made can best be built by making lobbying more transparent and curbing the access industry has to EU policy.

Recommendations:

1. Legislation to reign in the power of corporate lobbying which must include:

- A mandatory system of electronic registration that introduces mandatory reporting for all lobbyists with a significant annual lobbying budget and enforceable ethics rules for lobbyists
- Recording of formal and informal meetings between Commission officials and lobbyists and logging of correspondence, so that it becomes clear who is attempting to shape which policies
- Making public composition of all expert groups advising the Commission, for example of all Advisory Groups covering food and agriculture
- The termination of cases of privileged access and undue influence granted to corporate lobbyists, for example joint task forces in which corporate interests dominate and the privileged status accorded to business lobby groups like EuropaBio

2. The EU Biotech Strategy should be revised to acknowledge the failure of GM food and crops

- The EU should segment the different biotechnology sectors (green, white, red) and assess each one according to its strengths and weaknesses. This should also be done in other policy and legislative processes.
- The views of EU citizens, policies of major retailers, and the right to GM-free food and farming must be unconditionally respected. The EU strategy must acknowledge that EU citizens have now been consistently opposed to genetically modified food and crops for ten years.
- Based on the evidence from research, including government and industry figures, EU biotech strategy must acknowledge the failure of genetically modified food and crops and therefore exclude this sector when fixing new targets
- The European Commission should carry out a policy-specific audit of EU agri-biotechnology policies and research funding

3. EU research priorities and funding should focus on ecologically compatible farming schemes.

- The EU's seventh research programme (FP7) should de-prioritise its theme on "biotechnology and food".
- Future research priorities, including under FP7, on competitive agriculture and food sectors should increase focus on the potential, and challenges, shown by agri-environmental sectors, including organic farming.
- Greater priority should be given to DG Research "Science in society" initiatives
- A Technology Platform on organic farming should be funded by the European Commission
- EU funding under FP7 should be made available to develop an EU research project on the socio-economic impacts of agri-environmental farming in EU member states. Such a study should include stakeholder participation from the very beginning of the study and should be carried out by an independent body, such as the European Environment Agency.

"By keeping Europe at the cutting edge of biotechnology research, we will also contribute to the more general goals of creating more highly-qualified and well-paid jobs, boost economic growth and improve our terms-of-trade."
Günter Verheugen, European Commission Vice President, Press release, 2005

"Statistics on biotechnology employment cannot be obtained from official sources [...] because standardised data collection is not available for this industry that stretches across several industrial sectors. Some data is available, but mainly categorised in employment per Member State, not per biotechnology sector (white, green and red), which is a less than precise definition."
Günter Verheugen, European Commission Vice President, written response to parliamentary question, 2006

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