



"Freedom and Responsibility in Research"

On the Status Quo of the Research Framework Applied to "Green Genetic Engineering"

Memorandum by the DLG and DFG Senate Commission on Substances and Resources in Agriculture

A sufficient supply of healthy food for humanity, environmentally friendly energy production and overcoming climate change - those are the subjects that decisively determine future development on our planet. More and more people need to be supported by a finite land area. Without a sustainable increase in the productivity of usable agricultural land, we will not be able to master the challenges we face.

To enable a sustainable increase in the yield from agricultural land, a number of measures are necessary. An important starting point is progress in the cultivation of agricultural crop plants. Alongside the classic methods of plant breeding, modern techniques of green genetic engineering offer important potential for a sustainable increase in productivity.

We therefore cannot afford to forgo research in green genetic engineering. Research does, however, need a reliable framework so that those doing the research can take up their responsibility in the "research – development – innovation" chain, and so that a rational approach to the technology is possible.

Scientists at universities, public research institutions and medium-sized businesses find themselves increasingly compelled to restrict their research projects in the area of green genetic engineering or to abandon them entirely. There is a danger that this will mean an important research direction in Germany will be lost.

In 2008 alone, genetic engineering opponents illegally destroyed 25 fields and forced the abandonment of numerous research projects with genetically modified plants. The tendency has been on the increase for some years. With the destruction of field trials, not only is important basic scientific research on plants prevented, but also essential safety-related research in the field of green genetic engineering. These criminal offences are preventing research and development to an increasing extent.

Politicians and society at large should have a strong interest in Germany also assuming a leading position in research into green genetic engineering again, so that it is able to fulfil its responsibilities in the international community. To achieve this the following points form an essential prerequisite:

- Research needs a reliable legal and social framework. Political decisions and legal foundations should be based on scientifically sound risk/benefit assessment.
- Every strand of research needs an open-minded and critically supportive social climate so that inventive talent can be promoted and the challenges of the future can be met. This should apply also to research into green genetic engineering.
- Research on plants cannot be restricted to laboratories and greenhouses. This applies to basic research as much as to applied research. Whether new products are harmless and competitive can only be investigated under natural conditions in the outdoors. Also, quite fundamental botanical processes only can be understood if the relevance of the results obtained in the laboratory and greenhouse is tested in the natural environment.

The present decisions of politicians on the release of genetically modified maize, potatoes and barley are contradictory. They show that an unambiguous position based on factual arguments does not exist at present, and is urgently required.

The DFG and the DLG request the responsible decision makers in politics and society to support the points named above, to encourage science-based dialogue and to structure the framework in such a way that research can continue in freedom and responsibility.