Resolution 870 (1986)[1]

Biogenetic revolution in agriculture - a blessing or a curse?

Parliamentary Assembly

The Assembly,

1. Aware of the great potential of modern agricultural biogenetics—which focus on man-induced improvements to the genetic structure of plants and farm animals—for increasing agricultural production and contributing to reducing world hunger ;

2. Conscious also of the challenges facing this important science, owing to the complexity of genetic structures and interactions, and to the frequent trade-offs among properties in modified plants or animals, affecting their productivity and viability ;

3. Concerned that the increasing amounts of herbicides, pesticides, insecticides and artificial fertilisers, needed for the cultivation of many genetically refined plant varieties, may have damaging effects on the soil, groundwater, and ultimately human health ;

4. Hopeful, on the other hand, that this science may ultimately lead to the development of varieties which will rely less and less on the above types of products, and which could also serve as raw materials for various industrial processes ;

5. Aware of the consequences which radical increases in agricultural productivity, due to genetic improvements, could have for food markets and for the economic welfare of farming communities in disadvantaged regions ;

6. Concerned over the narrowing of the genetic base of many crop varieties resulting from the scientific improvement of preferred strains, and alarmed at the rapid extinction of many plant and animal species around the world, with potentially disastrous long-term consequences for our planet's life ;

7. Mindful of the current very large investment in biogenetic research, and stressing the danger that farmers may become dependent on a few multinational companies for the supply of seeds and accompanying products,

8. Calls on the governments of member states :

8.1. to ensure that biogenetic research as applied to agriculture takes into consideration the economic and social interests of farmers, and respects their traditional independence and way of life ;

8.2. to pay increased attention to the environmental dangers of the production methods associated with modern crops, particularly affecting the quality of the soil and groundwater, and the need to continue to provide consumers with healthy, high-quality food ;

8.3. to increase European co-operation and harmonisation of policies in agricultural biogenetic research, in order to enable Europe to keep up with industrialised countries in other parts of the world ;

1. See Doc. 5573, report of the Committee on Agriculture. Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 6 November 1986.

8.4. to increase their support in the efforts to safeguard the heritage of genetic varieties of plants and animals around the world, in particular the good work carried out by FAO in collaboration with theInternational Board for Plant Genetic Resources (IBPGR), and to give increased assistance in the development of varieties specially suited for Third World conditions ;

8.5. to further the ability of Third World countries to safeguard and develop their own genetic heritage in plants and animals through the establishment of research centres and a more efficient sharing of information.