



ABIC 2004

12-15 September, Cologne, Germany

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Cologne, 18/10/2004

ABIC 2004 is over - AgBiotechnology geared up again in Europe

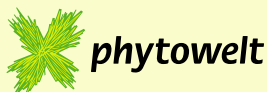


Lord Mayor City of Cologne | Fritz Schramma



Panorama Auenplatz

▶ HOST OF ABIC 2004



www.phytowelt.com
contact@phytowelt.com

INTERVIEW WITH
DR. BERNWARD
GARTHOFF

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Dr. Bernward Garthoff
Chief Technology Officer

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Hinako Schroeter comment says it all. "This event has been like four conferences in one," the Japanese venture capitalist (co-founder and General Partner of Biofrontier Partners) declared at the close of ABIC 2004, when asked to comment on the quality of the 54 speakers and 750 Delegates from 38 nations who took part in the three-day event - which took great strides towards defining the current position of the science and its role at the cutting edge of agriculture.

ABIC 2004 Chairman Peter Welters emphasized the need for intelligent and informed public discourse on both the benefits and risks agbiotechnology offers - especially in the host country, Germany, where some politicians are exploiting the lack of public understanding to capture votes.

The program did not shy away from complex and controversial issues. In fact, a number of presentations, featuring blue-ribbon researchers like Allison Snow of the University of Ohio and others, dealt with the thorny subjects of coexistence and risk/benefit analysis.

Several NGOs launched their own "alternative" Ag-Biotech conference to focus on the special problems

of developing countries and what they felt was the ominous influence of multinational corporations. ABIC invited several of the "anti-ABIC" organizers to take part in an opening day podium discussion, but only very few of them accepted the offer.

The overall media response was tremendous, with nearly 70 accredited journalists taking advantage of the opportunity to get themselves up to speed on this rapidly-changing technology.

In addition to the conference the centrally located trade fair area served both as meeting point and as nutrition zone, which was to the benefit of the exhibiting companies who presented their services and products. Companies from Iceland to Israel demonstrated the many facets of biotech businesses.

Social events - such as the Monday night Hospitality Suite and the Tuesday night boat tour on the Rhine River - helped to leave a lasting and positive impression with the delegates.

The next ABIC will take place from August 6th to 9th, 2006 in Melbourne, State of Victoria, Australia.

ABIC 2004 Head Office Phytowelt GmbH: Kölsumer Weg 33 · D-41334 Nettetal · Germany · HRB 8524
Phone: +49.2162.7 78 59 · Fax: +49.2162.8 92 15 · Email: contact@phytowelt.de · contact@abic2004.org
Internet: www.phytowelt.de · www.abic2004.org



Bayer CropScience AG
Alfred-Nobel-Str. 50
D-40789 Monheim
Phone: +49.2173.38-0
info@bayercropscience.com
www.bayercropscience.com

Cologne, 10/10/2004

Interview with Dr. Bernward Garthoff

? One point emphasized over and over again at ABIC was that the European Commission generally approves of AgBiotech while the government's of certain member states oppose it. Do you see any progress on this front?

: It is true that some Member States appear so far less supportive than the European Commission. However if you look at Belgium, for example, you'll see that was a case where regional governments went their own way for a long time, but now the entire country is getting more pro-biotech. As you know, we just opened our new facilities in Gent and there we received a lot of positive signals from the Belgium authorities.

In general, that's how it is across Europe: you have resistance in certain areas, but you see a movement, because people are beginning to accept that there's more to it than just a discussion on food yields, but rather on consumer-oriented benefits and non-food issues, such as starch quality for industrial uses, to name a product on which our own company is quite focused.

You can certainly criticize the current administration here in Germany, but I'm not planning my research based on how things will be over the next two years. We are looking at time horizons of five to ten years for research and development projects.

? Do you have contingency plans for structuring your research outside of Germany - or even outside of Europe - if the regulatory environment does not improve?

: No. In addition to the research facilities in Lyon and Gent, we have a major group in Potsdam - which your readers may remember under its former name, Plant Tech - where we do a lot of research into starch and modified starches. Now it's called Bayer BioScience GmbH, but it's the same group, and it's a cornerstone of our research in AgBiotech.

Now, as I said before, I concede the current German federal government is not very supportive of AgBiotech - but if you look at the different states, for example Brandenburg, where Potsdam is located, the situation is different. The local government is a coalition between the Christian Democrats and the Social Democrats and the state's Prime Minister, Matthias Platzeck, was just re-elected.

His government is much more supportive of AgBiotech than the current federal government. He's visited our facilities in Potsdam several times for podium discussions and press conferences and so forth. North Rhine-Westphalia is also very supportive, with the exception of the Environment Minister, Bärbel Höhn.

? What kind of support can individual states offer - or is it better for them to just do a laissez-faire and stay out of the way?

: I do see a role for regional government's involvement. In Saxony-Anhalt, for example, the state is involved in the various co-existence trials. And Brandenburg is clearly supporting its biotech industry. Furthermore, the economics minister of North Rhine-Westphalia supported ABIC - both materially, with funding, and in spirit, with moral support.



Bayer CropScience

? What is Bayer doing to improve the image of AgBiotech in Europe?

: We, at Bayer CropScience, consider open dialogue with stakeholders as a priority. For instance since acquiring Aventis Crop Science, we have implemented an annual Science Forum for stakeholders - which most recently took place in Gent, when we inaugurated the new € 20 million research facility there. We invite stakeholders - including the media - and then discuss topics of new technology. Last year, nanotechnology was in the foreground. This year, in keeping with the location and occasion, AgBiotech was at the center as well as new technologies such as RNA interference. So we're trying to get AgBiotech into a language that can be understood by all stakeholders, and not just those with scientific training. We asked our scientists to prepare presentations of their lab work targeted to an audience of 16-year-old students, in addition to the usual scientific abstracts.

We had scientists from six research centres - from Monheim, Lyon, Gent, Potsdam, Frankfurt, Kansas City.

? Are you getting any indication that it's working?

: Yes! We've had a tremendous response - especially from scientists themselves, who say they are beginning to understand the importance of presenting themselves to the public. They realize how difficult it has been to phrase their research in an accessible way, and this has forced them to confront the inaccessibility of previous communication.

? Even though you have no plans to move outside Europe, you cannot deny that Europe lags the US and Canada in biotechnology?

: Not in terms of the technology itself. If you look back, the nucleus was in Europe - in Gent and Cologne. Of course, in terms of acceptance it lags, and outside of Spain there is not much support, but I think we are getting there. Even if you didn't have the possibility of acceptance in Germany, we would still go with our European... page 03_>>>

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ABIC 2004 Head Office Phytowelt GmbH: Kölsumer Weg 33 · D-41334 Nettetal · Germany · HRB 8524
Phone: +49.2162.7 78 59 · Fax: +49.2162.8 92 15 · Email: contact@phytowelt.de · contact@abic2004.org
Internet: www.phytowelt.de · www.abic2004.org

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...involvement. Of course, we also have development sites in the US and in Canada, so it's not as black and white as people would like to paint it.

? **How long before Europe catches up in commercializing this technology?**

■ If the current regulatory climate persists, you're right: there won't be much cultivation in Europe but there will be at least some importing of GM produce. But I am not too concerned. The implementation of the labelling regulation in Europe is going to allow consumers to become familiar with products of modern biotechnology. Moreover, we start to see that several governments in Europe are again becoming more balanced and supportive for this technology. The responses we received from the Belgian authorities recently are illustrative for this case and are not an isolated case.

And let's not forget that red biotech began to spread most rapidly outside of Europe, but today the major users are the people over here.

So, even though there is always resistance at the beginning, once you come up with the appropriate products that are not only herbicide-tolerant and insect-tolerant, there will be a change. That's why we are working on quality products, like for instance starch-modified transparencies. Food is one aspect, but not the only one.

? **What do you see as the most promising of the new consumer-oriented technologies?**

■ There are too many to pick out just one, but for us it's the starch modifications in the first place, because it has such a broad application. And it's much easier to have alliances with downstream developers, such as paper companies and consumer care and cosmetics. But ultimately, these products will succeed because they go to the consumer rather than to the farmer.

Other agricultural crops that are particularly interesting for our company are cotton, canola, and rice.

? **What are the keys to balancing business concerns with common good concerns?**

■ We work with a variety of organizations to disseminate knowledge and know-how among people who need it the most. A good example is the golden rice project, in which 21 institutions gave free licenses to their technology.

We are also working with the World Bank and the CGIAR Institutes to build private-public partnerships for such things as knowledge exchange. We also will engage in a number of projects designed to both exchange knowledge and inform the population in, for example, Latin America, about how to deal with certain products - safety issues, teaching issues, etc.



AgBiotech: Come or Go?

Although the success of ABIC 2004 has certainly lent support to the image of agbiotechnology in Europe, the struggle for general acceptance is still a ways off in Germany - as the following examples show.

Just weeks after ABIC 2004 wrapped up, BASF has threatened to relocate parts of its research - namely those involved in green genetic engineering - to other countries if German laws continue to restrict R&D in plant biotechnology. Company chairman Jürgen Hambrecht emphasized that BASF regards green genetic engineering as crucial for the future of humanity.

While German laws remain rather restrictive and German plant biotechnologists get the impression that the Ministry of Consumer Protection, Food and Agriculture advocates an agriculture that is based on scythe and ox cart, there are sighs of hope.

German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder has demanded a more opportunity-oriented attitude towards new technologies, especially towards the products of genetic engineering. "In comparison to Americans, Germans think about the risks first," Schroeder noted during a convention for the Council for Engineering Sciences at the Union of the German Academies of Science and Humanities (Acatech).



This observation conforms with the Chinese way of treating risk that Klaus Ammann used to conclude his presentation at ABIC 2004 (Ecological Impact of GMOs). Europeans tend to associate "Risks" of a new technology only with the potential dangers involved - however low the probabilities for mishaps may be. In contrast to that, the Chinese way of writing takes into account that there is always something to gain when taking a risk - the word is a combination of the pictograms "Chance" and "Hazard".

▶ **PRESS CLIP**

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The organisers of ABIC 2004 should be congratulated on the content, range of expert speakers and the smooth running of the conference.

The professional and responsible way in which this conference was presented will undoubtedly go a long way to help the biotech industry achieve the momentum that it seeks, particularly in Europe.



危机 = 危 + 机
Risk = Hazard + Chance

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ABIC 2004 Head Office Phytowelt GmbH: Kölsumer Weg 33 · D-41334 Nettetal · Germany · HRB 8524
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Internet: www.phytowelt.de · www.abic2004.org



Florence Wambugu



Chris Somerville



Hinako Schroeter



Takuji Sasaki



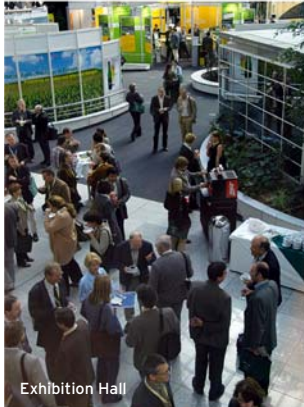
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Hans Kast



Lothar Willmitzer



Exhibition Hall



Handover Ceremony



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Press Conference



Cologne, 12-15 September

ABIC 2004 IMPRESSIONS

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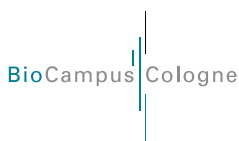
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ABIC 2004 Head Office Phytowelt GmbH: Kölsumer Weg 33 · D-41334 Nettetal · Germany · HRB 8524
 Phone: +49.2162.7 78 59 · Fax: +49.2162.8 92 15 · Email: contact@phytowelt.de · contact@abic2004.org
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