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**“GMOs, Science and the Public:  
Factors Explaining Mistrust in France and throughout Western Europe”**

**ABSTRACT**

For the last 10 years opposition to GMOs has tended to increase in Europe, particularly in France, even if transgenic crops have developed quickly in some other countries. Western European opposition is linked in particular to a risks/benefits balance perceived as unfavourable by a large part of the public, along with the involved NGOs. Many people are afraid of diverse risks of GMOs and, on the other hand, can see no likely benefits to compensate the risks. The expert reports, generally rather favourable, made on the authorized GMOs did not solve the controversy. Indeed the opponents of GMOs frequently lend more credence to the counter evaluation of the hostile organizations and the detractors than to the expertise of many official scientific bodies.

This distrust of official scientific evaluations from specialized agencies (i.e. agencies releasing expert opinions and advisory reports on the safety of products and processes) as well as from universities, academies and research bodies, notably results from links between scientists and industry. It is feared that these links, which the scientists can have (now, formerly, or later) with the firms in the case of contracts, can bias their evaluations. For the activists and part of the public, the statements and the expertise expressed by the scientists are not independent enough and are thus questionable. Furthermore, as far as socio-economic and environmental impacts of GMOs are considered, the diversity of opinions within the scientific community leads to doubt, suspicion and worries.

In addition, GMOs are perceived as an innovation imposed on consumers and society almost by force, against their will, by vaunting rather hypothetical benefits while underestimating risks. Now for several years, several movements have been underlining the necessity of greater participation of citizens in scientific and technological choices and in the directions taken in these domains. In addition one fears that an excess of technology will turn out disastrous because of unexpected negative consequences.

Thus we observe a certain increase in the distrust towards:

– the excess of technology likely to prove negative tomorrow,

- the expertise and the notices of experts, even scientific, considered insufficiently independent,
- the choice of orientations considered too closely bound to the requirements of financial capital and industry, without taking sufficiently into account the welfare of the people and the preservation of natural resources.

This paper will analyse these aspects in the case of the opposition to GMOs in Europe, especially as these issues concern not only this sector, but also other parts of agribusiness, food processing, pharmaceuticals and toxicological assessment of chemicals, etc.