

To: Dr. Bernhard Url, Executive Director
European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)

Avignon, 15 April 2016

Subject: follow up on incrimination of
IOBC-WPRS in open letter addressed to EFSA

Dear Dr. Url,

We recently stumbled upon a document posted on the website of the company Testbiotech e.V., which urges you to "make sure that none of the staff members of the (EFSA) GMO unit or GMO panel are actively involved in institutions ... such as ... IOBC /WPRS" and asserts that IOBC-WPRS has "strong affiliations to the GMO industry". http://www.testbiotech.org/sites/default/files/Testbiotech_Letter%20to%20Bernhard%20Url_March_2016.pdf

The purpose of the present letter is to provide factual information about IOBC-WPRS and contend that the relationship of our organisation with the GMO industry is wrongly portrayed by Testbiotech e.V.

What is IOBC-WPRS and what are its missions?

IOBC-WPRS is one of six regional sections of the International Organisation for Biological Control, a non-profit scientific organisation established in 1955 to promote environmentally safe methods of pest and disease control in plant protection. <http://www.iobc-wprs.org/>

IOBC-WPRS encourages collaboration among actors of research and development in biological and integrated pest management and fosters both research on and application of environment-friendly methods of plant protection.

To this end, it deploys a wide range of activities through its 20 working groups and 5 commissions (http://www.iobc-wprs.org/expert_groups/index.html). This includes the organisation of scientific meetings and workshops (approximately 10 per year) on biocontrol and Integrated Pest Management, but also the publication of various documents from scientific papers to practical guidelines for farmers, farm advisors and (regulatory) authorities (<http://www.iobc-wprs.org/pub/index.html>). IOBC-WPRS also offers training and expertise and is called upon by national and EU policy makers as a stakeholder or to provide expertise.

IOBC-WPRS currently has a membership of nearly 400 individual professionals (mostly scientists) from 40 countries, together with several institutional and supporting members from governmental and scientific organisations and the private sector.

What is the role of industry in the activities of IOBC-WPRS?

IOBC-WPRS does not discriminate against certain categories of professionals. All professionals interested in the missions of IOBC-WPRS are welcome to take part in scientific meetings, workshops and other activities of our organisation, whether they come from the public or the private sector. In fact, years of experience in our Working Groups have shown the collective benefit of interactions between persons with a wide diversity of backgrounds (students, academic researchers, scientists from industry or governmental bodies, together with various kinds of stakeholders).

Nevertheless, IOBC-WPRS is also quite intent on focusing on science and keeping its independence from any commercial interests. Financial independence is carefully maintained. The yearly income of IOBC-WPRS (published in the IOBC-WPRS Bulletins) is constituted mostly from membership dues

(90% or more) and the sale of publications. For companies, membership of IOBC-WPRS is only possible as supporting members (who do not have the right to vote in elections and consultations). Supporting members comprise mainly small institutions, libraries, public research departments, and biological control companies. IOBC-WPRS does not prohibit sponsorship from private sources for the organisation of scientific meetings of its Working Groups, but this is done independently from IOBC under the budgetary responsibility of the local academic organiser and sponsors are publicly acknowledged in the books of abstracts and/or proceedings.

What are the activities of the Working Group "GMO's in integrated plant production" and what are its links with industry?

The IOBC-WPRS working group "GMO's in Integrated Plant Production", established in 2003, has been organizing scientific meetings every second year. The meetings provide a platform for open discussions among different stakeholders including public sector scientists, industry scientists, regulators, decision makers, and NGOs. A programme committee comprising members of different stakeholder groups is composed for each meeting to ensure an interesting and broad coverage of contributions. As GMOs have always been a critical topic, the Working Group and its local organizers never had funding from the private sector for the organization of WG meetings or other activities. Sponsorship, if at all, was obtained from government grants and from hosting institutions. This principle will be maintained in the future.

During the term of the previous convenor, Jörg Romeis, a special WG activity developed a series of guidelines on non-target risk assessment and regulation, following two workshops with participants from regulatory authorities, the private sector, and public scientists. As a result of this activity, 3 peer-reviewed consensus papers were published with all participants of the activity being coauthors. No funding by the private sector was received to organize these workshops. There are no links or financial interests of the Working Group to industry except the coauthorship of some industry scientists on those publications.

We will be happy to provide further information about IOBC-WPRS and its activities if this could be useful to you.

Sincerely,



Dr. Philippe C. NICOT
President of IOBC-WPRS
<http://www.iobc-wprs.org/>



Dr. Michael Meissle
Convenor of the Working Group
«GMOs in Integrated Plant Production»