

## **GMOs: EUROPEAN PUBLIC OPINION IS AGAINST THEM IN ITALY, ONLY 24% IN FAVOR OF TRANSGENIC CROPS**

*From overall trust in the US to Europe's doubts: public opinion regarding GMOs is contradictory despite major global tension around food security, the crisis in farming productivity and shortage of water. This is the theme of the third webinar organized by the Barilla Center for Food & Nutrition which will be held in Milan tomorrow on July 20, at 5 pm and broadcast in live streaming on the website [www.barillacfn.com](http://www.barillacfn.com)*

**Milan, July 19, 2011 – Today, production of GMO crops around the world is concentrated in 10 industrialized countries with 96% of a total of 148 million hectares** growing transgenic crops, while another 19 countries produce the remaining 4%. Among these are **8 European countries** – Germany, Poland, Portugal, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, Spain and Sweden – which in 2010 utilized GMO seeds in a **total of approx. 100,000 hectares**, within a European context in which **public opinion overall is against** the use of transgenic-type biotechnologies in the agrifood sector.

In fact, a recent Eurobarometer survey on life sciences and biotechnologies revealed that the percentage of European citizens optimistic about future innovation in the life sciences and biotechnologies sector has remained substantially unchanged since 2005 (53%), while pessimists have increased from 12% to 20% in 2010. Analysis of these figures reveals strong opposition to transgenic GMOs, with over 50% of the European population against their adoption. **Over the last five years, trust in transgenic crops has progressively decreased** in all countries: **in Italy it dropped from 42% in 2005 to 24% in 2010**, with similar decreases in Spain (53% to 35%), Portugal (56% to 37%) and France (23% to 16%), while remaining stable, albeit at very low levels, in Germany (22%).

**Nonetheless, the European Union is looking to the new biotechnologies with extreme interest.** This can be seen in the incentive policies of the knowledge based economy adopted over the past decade and, more generally, by a strategic outlook that places considerable emphasis on biotech. Biotechnologies within the farming sector are seen favorably, as long as they are considered just one element in a more complex and articulated system. There is no prejudice against biotechnologies in the agrifood area, just great caution and attention regarding future GMO development.

Although the **United States** continues to be the **absolute leader** in this market with a total biotech cultivated surface area of **66.8 million hectares in 2010** and a growth in 2009 of 2.8 million hectares, the position of emerging countries vis-à-vis biotechnologies deserves special attention because of characteristics all their own. In particular, unlike the North American model characterized by a strong presence of private farms, in these countries the role of publicly-owned entities and bodies has been, and continues to be, fundamental in driving agrifood-related biotechnology research and development that is often focused on meeting internal consumption demands and taking on the problems connected with food security.

**China** deserves special note because, according to the ISAA (International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-Biotech Applications), **it is currently the sixth-ranked world producer of agrifood biotechnologies** in terms of cultivated surface area (behind the US, Brazil, Argentina, India and Canada) with about **3.5 million hectares in 2010**. **Chinese public investment** represents one of the most significant research efforts in the world and it continues to grow (**500 million dollars in 2010**). This major investment in research forms the basis of a large part of the economic growth in China which, thanks to the increase in agricultural productivity made possible by new technologies, has remained (until now) relatively self-sufficient in terms of main crops, despite the continued rise in population and resulting per capita consumption of food products.

In eight years, **India**, the fourth-largest world OGM agrifood producer, has become the **no. 2 producer and exporter of cotton in the world** through the introduction in 2002 of the **Bt42 cotton strain**. In 2010, this crop involved a surface area of **9.4 million hectares**, equal to 86% of the total surface area destined to cotton, and over **6 million small farmers**.

Today, on a global level, **in 2010 the most-common types of biotech plants were soya** (50% of world biotech crops), followed by **corn** (31%), **cotton** (12%) and **canola** (5%). In terms of its technological features, tolerance to herbicides is the dominant trait (61% of biotech-farmed land). The current debate centers around what role they could have in contributing to take on and solve the challenges of tomorrow in the agrifood sector, among which are the problem of **food security (one billion undernourished people)**, the **crisis in farming productivity (which dropped by 0.8% per year from 1990 to 2008)** and **scarcity of water (one billion people have less than 20 liters of freshwater per day)**.

These issues will be discussed tomorrow, July 20, during a **webinar organized by the Barilla Center for Food and Nutrition**, broadcast in live streaming on the website [www.barillacfn.com](http://www.barillacfn.com). The speakers include: **Camillo Ricordi**, scientist and professor at the University of Miami and member of the Advisory Board of the Barilla Center for Food and Nutrition; **Benedikt Haerlin**, director of the Foundation on Future Farming and director of Save Our Seeds; and **Klaus Ammann**, Emeritus Honorary Professor in Biodiversity at the University of Berne. Also on-line will be **Vandana Shiva**, political activist and environmentalist, and director of the Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Natural Resource Policy.

This webinar is part of a series of events organized by the Barilla Center over the course of the year which will offer debate on other hot topics relating to food and with direct involvement of international experts. Here is the program of upcoming BCFN Talks:

- September 8 – Milan, webinar, *A long and healthy life: what role does food play?*
- October 11 – Milan, webinar, *Children and nutrition: sustainable models for the new generations*

**All the webinars can be followed in live streaming from the [www.barillacfn.com](http://www.barillacfn.com) website.**

#### **Barilla Center for Food & Nutrition**

The Barilla Center for Food & Nutrition is a think tank with a multidisciplinary approach to the world of food and nutrition, connecting these to other related issues: economy, medicine, nutrition, sociology and the environment. The body which oversees the work of the Barilla Center for Food & Nutrition is the **Advisory Board**, which comprises: **Barbara Buchner**, environmentalist, **Mario Monti**, economist, **John Reilly**, environmentalist, **Gabriele Riccardi**, endocrinologist, **Camillo Ricordi**, scientist, **Claude Fischler**, sociologist, and **Umberto Veronesi**, oncologist.

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