Editor’s note: The following is a satirical letter written by Reinhard Szibor, professor emeritus of human genetics and forensic medicine at the Otto von Guericke University in Germany. It is written from the perspective of executives at a satirical “Big Ag” US company called “M-corporation” (Monsanto?) to German environmental NGOs and the politicians he believes they have cowed into opposing crop biotechnology on the scientifically false grounds that GMOs are harmful.

Dear Politicians and NGOs opposed to “Green Biotechnology,”

M-corporation belongs to the six largest companies (also called BIG-AG) that control 75% of the global market of agrochemicals and 60% of the seeds market. As managers of M-corporation we would like to express our gratitude for your excellent work and hope for further fruitful co-operation.

During recent years, M-corporation has spent $4.5 million per day for research and development. But money alone does not make innovation. We are very thankful that you are continuously sending well-trained scientists to our country to help strengthen America in general and the dominance of our company in particular.

Thanks to your prohibition politics on gene technology, young scientists do not see any chance to apply their knowledge and expertise in Germany and the EU and emigrate mainly to the US. Just recently, the decision of BASF to close down research and development in Germany led to the relocation of more than 100 excellent scientists from Limburgerhof to Raleigh, North Carolina. This has to be considered as a generous development aid of more than $200 million.

We thank you explicitly for your support and would like to emphasize that further science refugees are welcome!

In addition to development, costs for approval and safety evaluation of new gene technology products play a significant role. Thanks to the German gene technology legislation, our smaller, innovative competitors do not have sufficient financial resources to survive a process that may take 10 to 15 years and costs hundreds of millions of dollars. We urgently ask you to keep up with these standards – otherwise our dominance in the market may fade away.

New challenges are looming on the horizon and we urgently need your support!

The new genome-editing techniques like CRISPR/Cas allow for targeted changes in the DNA code as they may happen randomly in nature. Altering single nucleotides can switch genes on or off and can produce: canola with increased content of omega-3 fatty acids, blight-resistant wheat, drought-resistant corn, and tomatoes and strawberries which regained the original flavor.
A few years ago, BASF scientists developed the “Amflora” potato which made the production of industrial starch (amylopectin) more efficient and more environmentally friendly. It took 14 years to get the product in the market. Today, a good undergraduate student could do this as their thesis work.

This is extremely dangerous for us because young scientists could come up with innovative ideas, found a start-up company and swamp the market with new products. In addition, the editing technology is, in most cases, indistinguishable from natural mutations. On the contrary, the previous mutagenesis methods using radiation and cancerogenic chemicals produce thousands of mutations while editing produces only one. It is questionable if we can get patents on single-base substitutions that may as well occur by a beam of sunlight.

The best way to deal with this unfortunate situation is to prohibit genome editing in general. You successfully explained to the public that one known mutation is much more dangerous than several thousand unknown mutations. This campaign was unique and amazingly effective!

Congratulations! We also appreciate your creation of the term “extreme gene technology” for single base pair exchanges. If you manage to keep citizens scientifically illiterate and especially if you successfully replace science at schools with “the risks of technology” it will be easy to maintain our dominant position. Keep up the good work!

Unfortunately, not only plant breeding and genetic modifications are of concern to us. In India and Bangladesh, about 30% of vegetable supplies are eggplant.

Farmers spray 80 to 120 times per season to keep harvesting losses by the fruit borer under control. It is certainly not in our interest that the Indian company Mahyco developed a Bt eggplant that is resistant to the fruit borer. Our sales volume in pesticides almost collapsed in Bangladesh! Fortunately, Greenpeace, in collaboration with local pesticide producers, has achieved prohibition of Bt eggplant in India.

This clearly shows what we can achieve by concerted action! If we can no longer define which plants are developed and which are not, our profits will break down and you will lose us as your most needed official enemy! We strongly urge you to double your efforts – you can count on our support!

Your measures to expand organic farming by further subsidies is highly appreciated. The European Union (including Germany) is the largest importer of food and seeds worldwide. Yields in organic farming are up to 50% lower than in conventional farming. The more organic farming, the more imports are required. This is certainly of interest for us. In South America, our partners are looking forward to cultivating large areas of tropical rainforest to guarantee the food supplies of Germany!

Last but not least, we have noted with some concern that our corporation may be acquired by a German company. This is not good news since German companies usually have much higher social and ecological standards. This will cost huge amounts of money and significantly reduce our profits. As our reliable partners, we expect that you do whatever is possible to avoid this fusion and follow the mission of our President: “America first”!

We are aware that your campaigns require financial support and we will certainly provide adequate funding by safe channels. We count on your contribution to our mutual interests and we are looking
forward to a continuous fruitful collaboration.

Sincerely,

N.N.

Reinhard Szibor, professor emeritus of human genetics and forensic medicine at the Otto von Guericke University in Germany.