

Respecting Democracy - Preserving Freedom of Choice
No genetic engineering without risk assessment and labelling
in our fields and on our plates!
- A common framing for a common platform –

Individual organisations and actions against genetic engineering cannot develop the authority and clout that would be necessary to break the unfortunately very successful narratives of the Pro-GMO proponents. Catchy arguments and narratives like:

- *The Scientific Academies are behind us / We are the science / Follow the science!*
- *Opponents of genetic engineering are esoteric enemies of science*
- *Conventional mutation breeding with chemistry and radioactivity is like a shotgun blast to the genome and much riskier than targeted breeding with genetic scissors*
- *We need gene editing now for climate adaptation of agriculture*
- *Genetic engineering saves enormous amounts of CO2*

These arguments cannot be stopped by individual NGO actions against genetic engineering in the relatively short time available (even if they take place in parallel). We have been trying this for years without much success and to the contrary, we are increasingly put on the defensive.

A new, strong narrative

What we need, instead of many individual actions, is a bold, confident and well-coordinated campaign strategy breakthrough. So far, we have presented well-done, solid education (info events and brochures / letters to politicians / very good research by Testbiotech, GeN, Infodienst Gentechnik etc.). Of course, this is still important and correct. However, it has nothing to do with a campaign and obviously does not interest the general population, which actually rejects genetic engineering. Moreover, the existing platforms can only give us a limited visibility, as many media and science editors have strong reservations about "the usual suspects" among the genetic engineering critics and are themselves pro-genetic engineering.

For a real campaign strategy breakthrough, we need a new narrative that cannot be dragged onto the slippery slope of scientific (risk) arguments and one that even cautiously pro-GM actors can agree with. With primarily scientific arguments, we can only lose as we have nothing adequate to counter the "follow the science" framing because the people we actually want to reach disengage from debates about genetic engineering when it becomes too complicated for them. (Even though they reject genetic engineering on their own plates).

Learning from the climate movement

Our campaign strategy needs to be loud and scandalous in order to be heard, while at the same time precisely avoiding polarisation and establishing proximity to our target audience. Is that even possible? Yes! Because that's exactly what the climate movement has managed to do. We should learn from them. Fridays for Future are loud and scandalous, but avoid strong polarisation. Those in power have not been built up into bogeymen, but have an ongoing opportunity to step in, take action, prove themselves, and side with the "good guys". Above all, the climate movement appeals to emotions and values, creating closeness and humanity. This resonates! Scientific terminology (unfortunately) generates yawns, and potential genetic engineering risks seem even more abstract than climate change.

RM: A page from the original German text seems to be missing

The paper was therefore also reproduced by rather GMO-friendly media. We must continue the strategy of joint communications of many organisations on a neutral platform. We need a neutral web platform that is "unencumbered" for this new positioning of the lowest common denominator, with many representatives of civil society who first place the strong narrative of the violation of people's democratic right to self-determination above and beyond all the (necessary and sensible) scientific, risk and usefulness debates on genetic engineering.

Web platform at the lowest and at the same time strongest common denominator

This "neutral" web platform does not have to be very extensive. On the contrary, it must focus on our lowest common denominator. It should also actively attack and counteract the other side's narrative about "the opponents of genetic engineering". **We are not "against genetic engineering"- we are for freedom of choice.** (I myself, for example, have had myself vaccinated with genetic engineering). *Being "for" or "against" genetic engineering is the framing of the pro-genetic engineering proponents. We must not adopt it.*

We demand no more and no less than that the citizens' right to self-determination be respected. And they do not want genetic engineering. Especially not untested. Period.

We therefore say: If genetic engineering is to be used, then it must be risk-tested. Just like vaccines. Untested genetic engineering must not be smuggled secretly onto fields and plates.

Our petition content can be accommodated in a short text.

In addition, the platform needs:

- a petition widget (e.g. Proca)
- a simple editorial system so messages can be easily posted
- a widget to display posts in the social networks
- a Twitterstorm tool to influence debates & rankings on Twitter (see "PS")
- listing of petition supporters with names and logos (very important!)
- a "tell a friend" function for emails and Facebook
- Info box with the most important questions (and answers to open) on agro-genetic engineering and deregulation
- Links to important consensus-building materials and studies (position paper on genetic engineering, nature awareness study, etc.)

PS: A "common website for central measures & activities" as proposed in the workshop on strategy development on 17.12.21 cannot only build more pressure and authority by being seen as "critical civil society" (as opposed to being positioned as "NGOs critical of genetic engineering"). Such a platform is necessary to be able to carry out social media actions independent of organisations. For example, we need to create a common platform as a sender for common Twitterstorms where people without a Twitter account can participate in debates. (For more details, see the Twitterstorm tool exposé).

Strictly regulate genetic engineering also in the future!

Narrative and Framing

Task

Narrative, not only "slogans": develop complete text with decision-makers/victims/villains/heroines (in a small working group). Always let it resonate subliminally: New Genomic Techniques are also genetic engineering! Compile hero narratives from this (also with victims: empowerment!) 1/2 page

Narrative (key points from RTG workshop strategy development, 16-17.12.2021).

(Climate as the central topic of the new government - climate crisis can only be averted with greening of agriculture, diversity etc.; genetic engineering only distracts there!)

- possibly specify: AGRO genetic engineering
- Narrative must be relevant especially for the largest secondary target groups!
- With climate justice in the foreground, 'ecologisation' of agriculture is mandatory and only possible without genetic engineering.
- Independent farmer action is only possible if there is no GE free pass.
- Our freedom of choice is in danger, therefore we must act together.
- Freedom of choice requires transparency! If genetic engineering is so great, show it.
- Clear majority wants GMO-free and to decide about their own food (not BAYER)
- Respect for the freedom of consumers: Government/industry must not dictate what can be eaten.
- Genetic engineering is a tool of intensive agriculture
- Seeds/food must not be put into the hands of the corporations.
- Not that nature has to be changed; WE have to change! (deliberately exaggerated)
- Save the bees! Hubris, when we believe we can change everything as we like
- Plants/animals are more than the sum of their genes (epigenetics etc.)
- Strengthen (defend?) the precautionary principle
- Reversibility is the principle of responsibility for the freedom of future generations

Our framing (RTG workshop strategy development)

- Genetic engineering FREE; defend FREEDOM (of choice)
- Right of self-determination
- Nature / diversity vs. "unnatural"->- freedom for nature
- Transparency (product content, interests) vs. concealment.
- Corporate genetic engineering belongs in the laboratory! Risk technology
- Genetic engineering is "evil" (vs. nature is good)
- Genetic engineering = "manipulation" (food is manipulated, we are manipulated)
- Democracy on the plate

Framing of our opponents (RTG workshop strategy development)

- Climate needs CRISPR ...
- CRISPR overcomes world hunger
- Organic needs too much land ... ("efficiency" in a false sense)

Friedhelm Narrative

1/2 page.

Authentic food, regional and national specialties and their sustainable production and processing are the cornerstone of European culture and quality of life. Surveys and cash register receipts show how citizens imagine the future of their food: food production without genetic engineering and synthetic pesticides, but with species-appropriate animal husbandry and/or organic.

Global chemical and seed companies have no place in this future. That is why they are now trying with all their might to use genetic engineering to seize control of breeding and agriculture and force genetically manipulated plants and animals on farmers and consumers. The deceitful plan: that the strict rules for risk assessment and labelling of genetically engineered products in the EU are to be softened, at least for some genetic engineering methods, so that farmers or consumers will no longer be able to identify which seeds or foods have been genetically modified. The corporations' calculation: if people - as is currently the case in the USA, for example - can no longer know what they are buying and eating, they will eventually become indifferent. And by patenting genetically modified plants and animals, the corporations force breeders and farmers into a tight corset of licenses and restrictions on use, leaving them no room to breathe in the long term.

Instead of resolutely defending the freedom of their citizens, farmers and businesses, the EU Commission and some EU member state governments are now planning to actively pave the way for the corporations. The Commission is thinking aloud about "adjustments" to EU GMO law, without questioning who such "adjustments" will actually benefit. And politicians like the former German Minister of Agriculture Julia Klöckner are singing the praises of genetic engineering everywhere, because they do not dare make the changes in agriculture and nutrition that are necessary for the future of our planet and are therefore desperately looking for a "super technology" that solves all problems. The dangers of releasing genetically modified plants and animals for bees, the ecosystem and the economy are deliberately ignored.

Whether we will be able to decide for ourselves in the future what we eat and how we breed, cultivate or keep and eat plants and animals, or whether corporations like BAYER-Monsanto dictate what goes in our fields and on our plates, will be decided by the people on the ground: through their daily work in ecologically or conventionally GMO-free farms, through the purchase of appropriate products and through civil society commitment. In the next few months, the EU Commission will set a decisive course. The new German government must now show its colours and decide for whom it will stand: for the lobbying interests of the corporations or for the future of our environment and the freedom of choice of citizens and farms?