

Toronto: Bio 2002 Global Biotechnology Forum

Talking points

H.E. Luzius Wasescha, Ambassador, Delegate of the Swiss government for trade agreements

Ladies and Gentlemen,

With regards to Biotechnology, Switzerland is a greenlab:

- 240 enterprises are working in a tiny home market (7 millions), a cultural environment with four different languages and a direct democracy which challenges the communication capacities of enterprises, the academy and politicians.
- In 1997 the government received a comfortable majority of 66% of votes against the inscription of prohibitions of certain uses of biotechnology in the Federal Constitution. The debate led to the establishment of an ethical commission and a draft framework legislation which enters presently in a decisive phase in Parliament. Two main aspects are controversial:
 - a moratorium for testing in the open air (10 years, 5 years or none)
 - a specific system of liability

This process may lead to a referendum. A vote in 2003 or 2004 will be an additional challenge for a broad based communication in this complex subject. A policy dialogue was also started in 1997 between Universities and the public.

- Two further steps provide an adequate environment for a biotechnology public debate:
 - a revision of the patent law (to reach a comparable standard with the EU-provisions- i.e. the Biotech Directive)
 - increase of the federal budget for R+D
- The main challenge of those deadlines: how to promote innovation in a low risk-mentality-driven public opinion.

- Swiss innovative contributions have had international echos (Prof. Arber's work on restrictive enzyme or the golden rice, as two illustrations).
- The best comparative advantage of Switzerland: the narrow links between Finance-Industry-R+D and wise governance.
- The national efforts for the best regulatory environment can be strongly supported by international intergovernmental actions:

we appreciate the efforts made in OECD which have given positive inputs to develop legislation in the area of genetically modified foodstuffs.

- The ongoing WTO-DOHA round could address with broader support as just from EU, Switzerland and Norway:
 - the labelling related issues;
 - the precautionary principle;
 - the coherence between WTO and Multilateral environmental agreements;
 - specific aspects of intellectual property and traditional knowledge.
- Contributions of the global Biotechnology Forum:
 - inspire further policy dialogues at all levels (local, regional, national and international)
 - increase the visibility of practical applications of biotechnological inventions (success stories).

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