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Joint Statement by German Science Organisations on Green Genetic Engineering

Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung
Deutsche Akademie der Naturforscher Leopoldina
DFG - Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft
DAAD - Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst
FhG - Fraunhofer Gesellschaft
Helmholtz-Gemeinschaft Deutscher Forschungszentren
HRK - Hochschulrektorenkonferenz
WGL - Leibniz-Gemeinschaft
MPG - Max-Planck-Gesellschaft
Wissenschaftsrat

Germany's Federal Minister for Food, Agriculture and Consumer Protection, Ilse Aigner, has banned the cultivation of genetically modified maize. The ban took effect immediately on 14 April. The minister noted that the ban is an isolated decision on a particular case, not a fundamental rejection of green genetic engineering. Europe's highest licensing authority, the EFSA, had previously expressed no reservations about the cultivation of genetically modified maize. Germany's science and research community is very concerned that this decision will reinforce the tendency to approach this technology in an irrational manner and cause irreparable damage to Germany's potential as a location for the further development of what is likely to be an important technology in the future.

The German Science Organisations fully support an exploration of the opportunities and possible uses of green genetic engineering in Germany. Such exploration includes the impartial investigation of safety issues and potential risks. A broad range of in-depth scientific research of this kind has been taking place in Germany for years. This research is largely funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research and the state governments – either directly, or indirectly via organisations they fund – or is carried out in a special research department at the Federal Ministry for Food, Agriculture and Consumer Protection. This research has never produced reliable findings that would even remotely suggest the need to abandon the technology.

A complete rejection of green genetic engineering would do lasting damage to Germany as a location for research. Genetic engineering techniques derived from molecular biology offer a unique opportunity to develop more valuable, more environmentally friendly, more productive cash crops in this era of climate change. This view is consistent with findings from research funded by the federal government and with research findings from abroad concerning the risks of green genetic engineering versus classical plant breeding methods.

The ban poses the danger that unfounded fear could take the place of rational scientific information. The minister's comment that the ban is an isolated decision on a particular case cannot compensate for the negative impact it will have on Germany's status as a research-friendly country and the fact that it is diametrically opposed to future-minded advancement.

For all these reasons, we are fully opposed to any general ban on genetically engineered products. We urge politicians to lead a more logical discussion of the topic and to create reliable framework conditions for research

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into and scientific consultation on the future uses of green genetic engineering. We therefore enthusiastically endorse Federal Research Minister Annette Schavan's proposal for a roundtable discussion that would include scientists and politicians and send a clear signal regarding future research into genetically modified crops.