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"Scientists' Perspectives on the Deliberate Release of GM Crops"

Kvakkestad, Valborg, Frøydis Gillund, Kamilla Anette Kjølberg, and Arild Vatn

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In this paper we analyse scientists' perspectives on the release of genetically modified (GM) crops into the environment, and the relationship between their perspectives and the context that they work within, e.g. their place of employment (university or industry), funding of their research (public or industry) and their disciplinary background (ecology, molecular biology or conventional plant breeding). We employed Q-methodology to examine these issues. Two distinct factors were identified by interviewing 62 scientists. These two factors included 92 per cent of the sample. Scientists in factor 1 had a moderately negative attitude to GM crops and emphasised the uncertainty and ignorance involved, while scientists in factor 2 had a positive attitude to GM crops and emphasised that GM crops are useful and do not represent any unique risks compared to conventional crops. Funding had a significant effect on the perspective held by the scientists in this study. No ecologists were associated with factor 2, while all the scientists employed in the GM-industry were associated with this factor. The strong effects of training and funding might justify certain institutional changes concerning how we organise science and how we make public decisions when new technologies are to be evaluated. Policy makers should encourage more interdisciplinary training and research and they should make sure that representatives of different disciplines are involved in public decisions on new technologies.
— Text from The White Horse Press website

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