

Nobel Prize laureates unknowingly caught up in sales campaign for a biotech company?

Initiator of an appeal for the cultivation of genetically engineered rice is chief scientific officer of a company profiting from the production of genetically engineered plants

7 November 2016 / In June 2016, more than 100 Nobel Prize laureates signed an appeal in favour of the cultivation of so-called Golden Rice. Initiated by Sir Richard Roberts, who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1993, it targets and criticises anyone against the release of genetically engineered plants. For many years now, Roberts has been the chief scientific officer of New England Biolabs. Big corporates such as Monsanto, Syngenta and Dow AgroSciences are all clients of New England Biolabs. They purchase products generated at New England Biolabs for use in the genetic engineering of plants. In consequence, New England Biolabs makes a substantial profit from genetic engineering.

It is likely that most laureates who signed the appeal were not aware of the financial interests of New England Biolabs. Indeed, they will have assumed that they were signing up to a petition with solely humanitarian aims. The affiliations between New England Biolabs and the producers of genetically engineered plants have only recently come to the attention of Testbiotech. It came to light during Testbiotech patent research being carried out after questions posed by journalists. It appears that the big corporates are really good clients of New England Biolabs: Their products are listed in dozens of patent applications as the technical means for the production of genetically engineered plants.

So-called Golden Rice is genetically engineered to produce carotene, which gives a yellow colouring to the kernels. The rice is supposedly meant to combat Vitamin A deficiency, which is a severe problem in some developing countries. In actual fact, there is still a basic lack of data needed to make a judgement on the nutritional quality of the rice. There is also a lack of data on risk assessment. The laureates signed the appeal at a time when the most critical data was simply not available, as remains the case even now.

Testbiotech criticised the abovementioned campaign shortly after it was started because of its lack of credibility: The Nobel Prize laureates were more or less using the same arguments as those previously used by the radical proponents of the Golden Rice. Clearly, the laureates failed to double check the arguments used in the campaign. Even by 2014, Testbiotech had exposed the lack of credibility of the arguments used by extreme proponents involved in the Golden Rice Campaign.

Further information: [Recent article in the Dutch magazine](#) [1]

[The initiative of the Nobel Prize winners](#) [2]

[Testbiotech report on problems with the Golden Rice project](#) [3]

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Links

[1] <http://www.oneworld.nl/english/how-nobels4gmos-campaign-rife-biotech-industry-ties>

[2] <http://supportprecisionagriculture.org/>

[3] <http://www.testbiotech.org/en/node/1004>