

Negative fallout from public sentiment in Japan

To the editor:

As concerned plant scientists at major plant science research institutions in Japan, we would like to express our collective concern over the impact of Japanese public resistance to plant genetic engineering on the actions of local and national government. We are concerned that negative public sentiment could translate into government actions that will compromise overall competitiveness and research and development capability in the plant sciences.

For example, at the prefecture level, the local government in Hokkaido (a major region of agriculture) is currently formulating a bill scheduled for 2005 to ban planting genetically modified (GM) crops approved by the national Japanese authorities. The Tokyo metropolitan government and local farmers have already stopped the field assessment of a transgenic potato line at an experimental field in Tanashi city, Tokyo, apparently solely on the basis of negative public perception. These actions appear to have been prompted by

unsubstantiated fears that such planting might affect the local agriculture economy¹. We fear that they bring Japanese plant science closer to a critical situation in which research not only in the field but also in the laboratory will be threatened. At the national level, negative public sentiment may also affect funding allocation by the Japanese government in the plant sciences as a whole.

We urge Japanese political leaders not to abandon a technology that is readily being adopted by countries outside of Europe and could positively contribute to economic growth in Japan. Politicians have a responsibility to respect and honor the concerns of their electorate, but also should respect scientific consensus that genetic engineering is as safe as any other technology.

1. http://www.biotech-house.jp/news/news_84.html

Kazuo N. Watanabe & Tatsuhito Fujimura

Graduate School of Life and Environmental Sciences, University of Tsukuba, 1-1-1 Tennoudai, Tsukuba, Ibaraki, 305-8572, Japan

Ko Shimamoto, Takashi Hashimoto & Nozomi Koizumi

Nara Institute of Advanced Science and Technology, 8916-5, Takayama-cho, Ikoma, Nara, 630-0192, Japan

Hiroo Fukuda

Graduate School of Science, University of Tokyo, 7-3-1 Hongou, Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo, 113-0033, Japan

Satoshi Naito

Graduate School of Agriculture, Hokkaido University, Kita 9 Jou, Nishi 9 Choume, Kita-ku, Sapporo, Hokkaido 060-8589, Japan

Kenzo Nakamura

Graduate School of Bioagricultural Sciences, Nagoya University, Furou-cho, Chigusa-ku, Nagoya, Aichi, 464-8601, Japan

Tetsuro Mimura

Department of Biology, Faculty of Science, Kobe University, Rokkodai 1-1, Nada-ku, Kobe, 657-8501 Japan

Yuko Ohhashi

National Institute of Agrobiological Sciences, 2-1-2 Kannondai, Tsukuba, Ibaraki, 305-8602, Japan

Kenichirou Shimazaki

Graduate School of Sciences, Kyusyu University, 6-10-1 Hakozaki, Higashi-ku, Fukuoka, Fukuoka, 812-8581, Japan

Ichirou Terashima

Graduate School of Science, Osaka University, Yamadaoka, Suita, Osaka, 565-0871, Japan

Hirofumi Uchimiya

Institute of Cellular and Molecular Biology, University of Tokyo, 7-3-1 Hongou, Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo, 113-0033, Japan

Tomoyuki Yamaya

Graduate School of Agriculture, Tohoku University, Aramaki-aza-aoba, Aoba-ku, Sendai, Miyagi, 980-8578, Japan
e-mail(K.N.W.): nabechan@gene.tsukuba.ac.jp

Patent clarification

To the editor:

I read with interest the News in Brief

'BRCA2 patent awarded' by Peter Mitchell from the April issue (*Nat. Biotechnol.* 22, 373, 2004).

Mitchell states that the European patent granted to Cancer Research UK (CRUK) on 11 February 2004 "effectively breaks the monopoly of Myriad Genetics...which has held a limited European patent since May 2001 on the use of BRCA2 for diagnosis and genetic screening."

Mitchell points out that Myriad Genetics

(Salt Lake City, UT, USA) would need a license from CRUK

"before marketing BRCA2 testing in Europe" and then goes on to state that, assuming the CRUK patent is not overturned, "other laboratories can do BRCA2 testing without having to send all samples back to the Myriad's headquarters in Utah."

Mitchell seems to be saying that other laboratories are now in a position to perform BRCA2 testing without regard to Myriad

Genetics' patent. In my view, which is

