Mr. Dirk Toet

Biotechnology Coordination
Nestlé
Avenue Nestlé 55
CH-1800 Vevey
Switzerland

Dick Toet is responsible for Biotechnology Coordination at Nestlé's Group headquarters in Vevey. He studied organic chemistry/biochemistry at the University of Leiden, the Netherlands. Before joining Nestlé in 1996 as manager Regulatory Affairs, he worked with Hercules, Rijswijk, and Gist Brocades, Delft in various positions in R&D, Marketing and Strategy, Regulatory Affairs and Corporate Communications.

He is actively involved in industrial organisations such as Europabio, European Food Information Council and the Confederation of European Food Industry as well as in the Codex Alimentarius Committee on Food Additives and Contaminants.

In the past year he has been managing in close cooperation with the biotech industry a European-wide food biotech communication initiative.

Biotech, The Food Perspective: Coping With Consumer Concern

Biotechnology, or rather the application of genetic modification in agriculture, has provoked a heated and emotional debate, predominantly in some European countries but certainly not limited to those alone. Sadly, the debate has become so loud that a real dialogue, where both sides take each other seriously and are willing to listen to each other's arguments, seems to be impossible. Despite the current turmoil, the potential of the technology is enormous.

This is not meant to say that there are no questions to be asked or that this potential can be used as an argument not to answer them. To exploit that vast potential we must address the concerns that are expressed regarding the genetically modified (GM) crops now on the market and find acceptable solutions for consumers and farmers alike. These can only be achieved by continuing research and field trials to study the environmental impact these crops may have. From a food perspective, each new crop will be evaluated for its food safety on a case by case basis following the protocols developed by WHO, OECD, and national and European authorities.

Putting a stop to further research with the single justification of fear of the unknown will never answer any questions. Europe's food industry will be facing major challenges in the next decades from its ever more demanding customers. Only continuous innovation will allow it to overcome these challenges, but innovation can only be translated into successful products if consumers feel confident about them and benefit from them. Getting the consumer acceptance for innovative products produced with gene technology might be one of the bigger challenges for the food industry in the years to come. We do believe, however, that acceptance will be won, provided we are fully transparent about our products and consumers can see a clear benefit for them or their environment.