

The response reproduced below was submitted further to an invitation to comment on the draft Discussion Paper by the Nuffield Council on Bioethics: *The use of genetically modified crops in developing countries*, during June to August 2003. The views expressed are solely those of the respondent(s) and not those of the Council.

Dr Michael Hughes

Your update of the situation is very welcome.

You correctly point out that it would seem rational to subject new conventional cultivars to the same (or at least a more rigorous) testing regime as those for GMO's. This would, however, add cost but possibly not reduce overall risk. The method of substantial equivalence has served very well up to now. More cost means more expensive food, and more tests will probably also reduce the number of plant breeders to those who are prosperous enough to stand the risks, as it has with GMO's.

The third world needs GMO technology now, and it is probable that the developed world will need it also in the not so distant future. Given the poor level of political leadership in Europe, it is hard to imagine that GMO's will have anything other than a long and expensive entry into general use. This will mean that there will be little resource available in big biotech for what will be marginal investment for third world i.e. specialist GMO cultivars.