



## **CIRAD-INRA Joint Consultative Committee on Ethics in Agricultural Research**

### **TAKING UP THE FOOD CHALLENGE AND THAT OF NON-FOOD USE OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS. THE CASE OF LIQUID BIOFUELS**

#### Abstract of the statement issued at the 19 March 2010 meeting

INRA and CIRAD are increasingly being asked by their partners to work on improving traditional biofuels and speed up the shift to more sustainable modes of energy production. Taking up the food challenge and that of non-food use of agricultural products is not an ethical issue as such, providing the prominence of food uses is respected, global human food requirements are met, biodiversity and social rights are respected and pressure on cultivable land is not allowed to have too much of an adverse effect on ecosystem sustainability. However, in 2009, according to the FAO, more than a billion people worldwide were going hungry. At the same time, agricultural production capacity was under increasing demand for non-food uses from solvent countries keen to take up the latest energy and environmental challenges.

The Committee has worked to identify the reasons why biofuels research warrants particular attention in an ethical context. The debate focused on the question of liquid biofuels, in other words sales of agricultural products converted for energy purposes, since this reinforces the linkage between the energy and agricultural markets. The Committee studied both past and present relations between agriculture and energy.

The ethical questions relating to biofuels are not limited – far from it – to choosing between food and non-food use of agricultural products. They prompt a debate about the finalities of research. They highlight the fact that some stakeholders primarily pursue technological and economic ends, while others are more geared towards values such as ecology, biodiversity and multi-functionality. Solving the ethical issues surrounding biofuels does not merely mean resolving the conflict between rationales governed by these two types of ends. The Committee opted to look beyond the different interests at stake and use a grid of principles and values that juxtaposed or combined specifically physical principles (limited resource availability, systemic approaches, resistance and adaptability, etc) and moral principles (human dignity, freedom, equality). These principles, which are presented in the “preamble” (principles and values of the Committee on Ethics in Agricultural Research) are the cornerstone of the recommendations made, and go beyond the question of biofuels.

The **NINE RECOMMENDATIONS** encourage top management at the two organizations and their staff as a whole to keep an ethical eye on the finalities of biofuels research, working methods, and the relations between research policy and agricultural policy. The question of biofuels research, and beyond it that of potential competition between food and non-food production operations is an issue that contemporary scientific agronomy is now addressing with a fresh eye, helping to ensure a clearer understanding of the construction of new research topics whose complexity encompasses that of social demand in particular.

## IN TERMS OF GENERAL OPERATIONS

1. The new drive to innovate within the field of agronomy has seen the emergence of serious problems relating to the finite nature of resources (soils, water, fossil fuels, etc), and calls for the reconstruction of the issues to be tackled. The Committee recommends that INRA and CIRAD reappropriate the meaning of targeted research; it considers that ethical debate on targeted research will help build a new ethos.
2. As far as research on biofuels is concerned, the Committee advises INRA and CIRAD to make a clear distinction between what relates to research policy and organizations, and what concerns agricultural policy. It suggests they reflect on the meaning of the responsibility of research organizations and researchers, develop principles of transparency and obligation on every level and for every activity, and boost mutual information sharing with political and economic decision-makers.
3. The Committee encourages top management at the two organizations to work with the communities within which their researchers operate (centres, campuses, units) to foster debate with a view to ensuring the broader adoption of this vision, which leads researchers beyond the scientific fronts they know and towards working within the world and with others.

## IN TERMS OF RESEARCH OPERATIONS

4. The Committee recommends that when setting out the question of research and projects, their relevance should be clearly demonstrated, not just in relation to the state of science and technology, but also in relation to social demands and expectations.
5. To ensure ethical awareness during research work, the Committee recommends interdisciplinary operations, associating human science researchers. This will multiply the different viewpoints, not only legal and sociological but also philosophical, and could help researchers involved in natural sciences to formulate and express the ethical issues they encounter.
6. The Committee recommends that INRA and CIRAD develop impact assessment methodologies specific to biofuels.
7. The Committee recommends that particular attention be paid not only to access to the technologies used to produce biofuels, but also to fair sharing of the intellectual property rights associated with their development.

## IN TERMS OF PARTNERSHIPS

8. The Committee recommends that when choosing private-sector partners, the two organizations pay close attention to whether the firms concerned apply the international standards relating to sustainable development, in view of the close links between scientific and industrial issues.
9. To analyse the procedure to be followed when researchers undertake appraisals, the Committee recommends referring to the two statements on appraisals issued by the previous INRA Ethics Committee (COMEPRA) and the CNRS Ethics Committee (COMETS). The Committee also recommends implementing procedures for identifying and arbitrating conflicts of interest.