

EUCARPIA

29 Aug – 1 Sep 2016
Zurich/Switzerland



20th General Congress / Plant Breeding: the Art of Bringing Science to Life

Activists “fertilise” the General Congress

29 August 2016

It's around 11 o'clock when a group of activists enters the conference room of the ETH Zürich, throwing urine on the audience while painting 'Shit on technology' on the wall. When they were gone they left considerable damage, a mess of rotten eggs and poo and an audience full of incomprehension behind. The fact the activists choose our EUCARPIA congress for their action is quite remarkable as the plant scientists are just as concerned with the challenge of feeding the world and, like the activists seemed to claim, want to end the dependence on pesticides in agriculture. At the same time the production of crops has to use less water and fertilizers.

The EUCARPIA congress is visited by plant scientists and breeders from all over Europe and abroad to share the latest knowledge on plants. The scope of the congress is wide. Just a handful of the over 300 contributions deals with genetically modified plants, whereas the undisputed use of genetic information to complement conventional breeding takes a very important place in the programme. All opinions and views of how to meet the challenges of the future are represented in EUCARPIA. The president runs a successful organic breeding programme, while the president designate is involved in the development of cisgenetic disease resistant potatoes. Syngenta is a sponsor of the congress, and so is FiBL the research institute for organic agriculture.

Scientists attending the congress want to know how they can stimulate the plant to get the best out of its own power. Only if we know more about the genetic and physiological processes, we can achieve plant varieties which ensure yield security for the farmer, and ensure the product looks good and it tastes good while at the same time being at par with the environment. We need various technologies to better understand how plants function. They are our new microscope. The use of safe technology is thus a means but not a goal in itself to produce the varieties needed by traditional, conventional and organic agriculture. The way in which the activists choose to make their concern known was unorthodox but does not take away the fact that trying to feed a growing world population as well as doing this in a sustainable fashion is a daunting task which means that all help and technology which is safe and capable of achieving this has to be used.

Two of the escaping activists were arrested by the police thanks to the courageous reaction of two local congress participants who followed them. None of the participants of the congress has been in personal danger. After half an hour of suspending, the congress continues.

Zürich, 30 August 2016

The president
Beat Boller

The president designate
Richard Visser