

INTRODUCTION TO THE PITA PROJECT

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Technological innovation in the agrochemical, biotechnology, and seeds industries, and in associated public sector research establishments (PSREs) has the potential to deliver more socially and environmentally sustainable farming systems and to improve the quality of life of citizens in Europe. This is particularly true of farms on the most fertile land. However, although policies developed in different areas may all aim to improve the quality of life, in practice, in their influence on company and PSRE strategies, they frequently counteract one another and so attenuate the desired effect.

Market-related factors also influence decision making in industry and PSREs, the most important for the PITA project (Policy Influences on Technology for Agriculture) being the policies of food processors and distributors; and also public attitudes and opinion, which often set more demanding standards than those of national governments and the European Union (EU).

The PITA project (see figure 1) is developing an integrated analysis of policies and market-related factors relevant to the agrochemical, biotechnology, and seeds sectors. The core of the project is an investigation of the impact of these factors on the strategies and decision making of companies and PSREs. In addition, the downstream implications of public and private decisions on employment, international competitiveness, and environmental benefits. The final outcome of the project will be feedback of its conclusions to policy makers and company managers.

The range of policies and other influences studied includes the following,

- Policies to stimulate innovation in the agrochemical, biotechnology, and seeds industries.
- Purchasing policies of food processors and distributors.
- Policies for international trade liberalization.
- Policies for the regulation of industry and farming (i.e., for environmental protection, public health and safety, particularly, for pesticides and biotechnology).
- Agricultural and farming support policies, particularly, for crop production.
- Policies to promote environmental sustainability and wildlife biodiversity in arable farming areas.
- Public opinion and attitudes.

The overall aim of the project is to contribute to the development of sustainable industrial and farming systems and an improved quality of life by encouraging the development and uptake of “cleaner” technologies for intensive agriculture. Its objectives are as follows,

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1. To develop an integrated analysis of policies and market-related factors relevant to technological innovation in the agrochemical, biotechnology, and seeds sectors; to study their interactions; and to develop hypotheses about their impact on strategic decision making in industry and PSREs.
2. To study the influence of policies and market-related factors on innovation strategies in the agrochemical, biotechnology, and seeds industries and PSREs, and their impact on decisions about product development, levels of investment, and the location of investment.
3. To study the outcomes of the industry decisions investigated under objective 2, in their effects on employment, on international competitiveness and on their potential to deliver environmental benefits.

The papers in this special issue of *AgBioForum* are based on objective 2, that is, they focus on innovations strategies of the major companies in the European agrochemical, biotechnology, and seed industries.

Figure 1: Project Structure.

