



PRESS CONFERENCE/ROUND TABLE

NEW BIOTECHNOLOGIES IN AGRICULTURE: THE EUROPEAN PROJECT IPLANTA

Wednesday, October 2nd, 2019, 12.00 – 13.00

Room “Sala dei Presidenti”, Palazzo Giustiniani - via Giustiniani 11, Roma

The coordinator of the European project iPlanta COST Action, Prof. Bruno Mezzetti, of the Department of Agricultural Sciences of the Polytechnic University of Marche Region, and the coordinator of the working group on biosafety (WG3), Dr. Salvatore Arpaia, of the DTE Department of ENEA – the Italian National Agency for New Technologies, Energy and Sustainable Economic Development – are pleased to invite you to the press conference which will present the European project Iplanta, which is going to be held in Rome on October 2nd, 2019.

The RNAi technology, based on gene silencing by interfering RNA, has shown promising results in the protection of crops from new pathogens and parasites; emergencies whose damage to the main crops in Italy reaches over one billion euro a year ([Plantgest, 2019](#)).

The **public meeting** on October 2nd will have the aim to present the project activities and the possible scenario of the introduction of these and other biotechnologies into EU and Italian agriculture will be discussed. More details on the iPlanta project, the RNAi technology and possible areas of intervention are available in the attached press release.

A **round table** on regulatory and scientific requirements for field trials will follow at 14:30, with the participation of the following speakers: Prof. Joe Perry (former chair of the EFSA GMO Panel), Dr. Kara Giddings (Bayer U.S. - Crop Science R&D Regulatory Science), Prof. Godelieve Gheysen (Ghent University), Prof. Bruno Mezzetti (Polytechnic University of Marche Region), Prof. Huw Jones (Aberystwyth University), Prof. Michel Ravelonandro (INRA), Dr. Salvatore Arpaia (ENEA). The meeting will be moderated by Antonio Pascale, journalist, at the Hall of the Institute of Santa Maria in Aquiro, Piazza Capranica 72, Rome.

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- The opinions and contents expressed in the context of the initiative are the sole responsibility of the proposers and of the speakers and cannot in any way be traced back to the Senate of the Republic of Italy or to the bodies of the Senate itself.
 - Access to the rooms - with proper clothing and, for men, jacket and tie are considered an obligation-
 - Journalists must be accredited in the usual way, sending a fax with name and surname, place and date of birth, registration number to the OdG to the number 06.6706.2947.
 - Participation to the press conference and the round table is open to the public, until the capacity of the room is reached, sending its data to: iplanta@sm.univpm.it for the press conference; francesca.balducci@univpm.it for the round table.





PRESS RELEASE

NEW BIOTECHNOLOGIES IN AGRICULTURE: THE EUROPEAN IPLANTA PROJECT

The defense of crops from new pathogens and parasites is one of the main challenges that the agriculture sector is currently facing. The economic damage caused by several emergencies linked to recently spread harmful organisms, such as the bacterium *Xylella fastidiosa* and *Drosophila suzukii* diptera, amounts to about one million euros per year ([Plantgest, 2019](#)).

Technical and scientific innovation have an important role in guaranteeing the environmental, economic and social sustainability of this field. Access to all technologies available, including biotechnologies, is fundamental to face new dangers and reduce the use of pesticides in agriculture.

Promising results come from new methods based on the gene silencing system by interfering RNA (RNAi), which is able to enhance the defense capabilities of plants to respond to the attack of pathogens. With the RNAi technique it is possible to modulate the expression of plant genes without requiring the expression of new molecules. The characteristics of mobility through the plant's vascular system offer the possibility to transform rootstocks for woody plants for stable expression of RNAi, conferring resistance to scions producing non-GM fruits. RNA molecules can also be produced and applied as a topical treatment to plants to change their physiology or control on pests and pathogens. It is realistic to consider imminent the availability of dsRNA as a biopesticide applicable as foliar spray, seed tanning or directly in the soil.

The iPlanta project (<https://iplanta.univpm.it/>), organized within the framework of the European program Horizon2020 COST and coordinated by Prof. Bruno Mezzetti (Department of Agricultural Sciences of the Polytechnic University of Marche), aims to connect the main research groups active in RNAi technology in Europe and America, with international organizations such as EFSA, FAO and private companies. For Italy, the following research groups and institutes are involved: the Universities of Ancona, Bologna, Verona, and Rome "La Sapienza", the research institutes CREA, CNR, ENEA, private companies and professional organizations.

According to prof. Mezzetti *"to face the emergencies that characterize EU agriculture and in particular Italian agriculture it is fundamental to be able to apply all available technologies, including all biotechnologies, and to show the benefits to public opinion by activating experimentation in the field"*. The aspects of environmental and health safety are assessed by the working group coordinated by Prof. Salvatore Arpaia of ENEA, who believes that *"a strong point of the applications of RNAi can be a high specificity of action against harmful species, we are working already to evaluate the biosafety of these products for non-target organisms, and clearly for consumers first of all"*.

