

**Minutes from webinar 7 organized as the final communication and dissemination meeting of working group 5 with the title “The Contribution of**

**RNAi for sustainable and resilient food systems & health arranged Tuesday**

**23<sup>rd</sup> February 2021**

<https://www.iplantawebinars.com/event/5fe1f1e652a27f1f072c999f>

<https://iplanta.univpm.it/node/85>

The meeting was a success with 180 registered, 160 attending and a good discussion amount speakers and the participants. It is sad ending this good walk over five years of the iPlanta COST action, in the Covid-19 world where we can't meet as that is one of the highly valued contribution of COST. The upside is that we could get our highest wanted speakers as attending took less time and effort and welcome all interested participants completely borderless. Specific to our action is also the increased general interest of RNAi opportunities given the mRNA vaccines for Covid19. It is work on replacing the mRNA basis with RNAi, which would avoid the ultra freezing demands and as such be safer, reach many more and be a more sustainable vaccine approach. Additionally since most now have heard the name RNA, it opens more general interest of RNAi which is still a foreign term to most stakeholders and people in general.

The webinar had nine speakers covering RNAi user perspectives, medical applications including an economist perspective on RNAi attention, and communicating RNAi and solutions in our new Covid-19 globe. In addition we had three chairs guiding the discussions (see the program for more information <https://www.iplantawebinars.com/event/5fe1f1e652a27f1f072c999f>). Mark Lynas started by addressing RNAi with a GMO history, and underpinned that nobody knows what the heck RNAi is. He said he had a change of heart from his Greenpeace history, and wrote a book with many chapters explaining how, since he could scientifically justify an opposition against GM solutions. This is in accordance with 110 Nobel prize winners letter to Green peace in 2016, to change their stand on GMO after decades showing no reason to claim it might have an increased risk to conventional breeding solutions. Mark reminded us that there is no necessary to get a majority in favor of new solutions such as RNAi, since there is not going to be a referendum. However, the opinion formers need to understand and front it, so that policymakers can see the benefits and advocate good sustainable solutions. He as many before him and others

at the webinar also pointed to the need for consumers to see a reason for why RNAi or GM is the best choice. That even though consumers don't need to understand a mobile phone to use and choose it. Resistant plants against virus, fungi or pests might not really mean much to consumers, even though farmers see the importance and need for it. Consumers drive towards a greener diet on the contrary is easy to communicate such as the Impossible food which really has been a success story in the US hitting a marked drive and clearly explaining why GM solutions where the only viable nature friendly options to produce pure vegetarian food tasting meat and as such being chosen by the worlds 95% preferentially meat eaters. This topic is covered in our book being launched now. More of these discussions can be seen at the YouTube recorded video of the whole webinar or short highlights being put together now in two videos from all our webinars. Joachim Scholderer added to this by presenting a Google trends overview showing RNAi don't have what it takes to really make a buzz.

Cihan Tastan gave us an insight into options with RNAi for diagnostics and therapeutics, followed with Hanspeter Naegeli's perspective on RNAi options and also some EFSA updates. RNAi is also complicated to risk assess as it depends on whether the RNAi effect is transferred as stable nucleotides being expressed by the genome, or a topically added as biocides administered as bioclay particles or alike.

On communication Jo Røislien opened by focusing on how scientists with knowledge of pandemics and technical solutions have "taken over much of the world" when we were hit by the Covid-19 virus, and that this is part of the crisis that also opens up for opportunities. He showed a great video illustrating this. Greg Watson and Hilde-Gunn Opsahl Sorteberg pointed to how it is important to use the right words to communicate solutions such as RNAi the principle learned from natural processes happening in all living organisms, and products that will be differently perceived if named biocides or virucide rather than pesticide. Greg importantly reminded us of the importance to avoid sweeping claims and negative wording, e.g. that gene fine-tuning is a good description while knock-out is not. We ended by taking a group picture of video screens from the US and across Europe and many were left with an uplifted view of the future for RNAi.