



Public perception in university and educational institutions about clonal forestry and forest biotechnology in Argentina and Venezuela

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The issue of clonal planting and biotechnology has captured unprecedented public interest and concern throughout the world, and South America has not kept out of this debate. The debate includes scientific aspects, ethical issues and possible environmental, economic and social impacts, as well as health, technological dependence and sovereignty. Biotechnology in South America has grown rapidly in recent years, highlighting Micro propagation as one of the most used bio-technics. However, forest biotechnology (mainly GM trees) and clonal forestry face constraints that limit their social acceptance, due to aggressive campaigns by environmental NGOs and environmentalists, directed at people who are unaware of the issue, and based on information from unreliable sources. The objective of this work was to conduct a KAP (knowledge, attitudes and practices) survey that targeted Forest engineering students and those in Environmental Sciences (Argentina), Biological Sciences and Environmental Sciences and Agro ecology (Venezuela) to determine the acceptance level in relation to the use of forestry and forest biotechnology. There were differences in responses according to country, career and gender. The results show that environmental awareness is the most important concern, focused on the loss of biodiversity. Of students 76% know what a plant clone is, but they do not know how they are produced. However, they identify different vegetative propagation techniques, the best known being the propagation through cuttings and grafts, and the least known being somatic embryogenesis in the in vitro area. All the students answered that they know what biotechnology is, but they could not select the correct definition. Points of view on these issues differ between and within countries, because South America is a cultural mosaic, where questions about the acceptance of new technologies have a different basis depending on what each nation considers most important. In conclusion, this preliminary study showed that these subjects should be included in the curriculum of the surveyed careers, incorporating in each country, characteristic local elements of importance to the environment.

