

“Rock for Nature”

When eco meets music: Fantastic success for a music festival against GMOs

This August Germany celebrated its first open air eco festival, “Rock for Nature”. The music festival, which took place in a 30 hectare wheat field on an organic farm in Wolpertshausen near Schwaebisch Hall, Germany, from 21 to 24 August 2008, was organised by the farmer cooperative, Baeuerliche Erzeugergemeinschaft Schwaebisch Hall (BESH). Following in the footsteps of Woodstock with the motto “Love and Peace for Nature”, the message powerfully transmitted throughout the whole event was the struggle for GMO-free production and for organic agriculture.

More than 70,000 visitors came to celebrate with the celebrities who performed on one main and two secondary stages. National and international music stars, like Joe Cocker, Wir sind Helden, Nena, Roger Hodgson, Ich + Ich, Joy Fleming and the Scorpions, as well as 40 newcomer bands, honoured the visitors with not only their music, but also their statements against genetic engineering and support for organic farming.

Joe Cocker’s performance was one of the festival’s highlights. On stage, he spoke of being a great friend of nature, and expressed his love of cultivating his own organic tomatoes. Joe Cocker, who is actually on a concert tour through America, interrupted his tour especially to perform in Wolpertshausen – his only European concert in 2008. He was visibly impressed by the festival and its organisation by local farmers. While on stage he credited music to be an ideal way of spreading the message. This is as true for “Rock for Nature” in 2008 as it was for Woodstock all those years ago.

Roger Hodgson, co-founder and ex-Supertramp, was also enthusiastic for the festival’s message. He explained that he was very worried about the consequences of genetic engineering, and aims to use his music to change our world a little bit. Calling upon the audience “to think and act increasingly with their hearts” he gave a performance that left everyone in awe, with many calling for an encore.

Members of the German hard rock band, Scorpions, which performs all over the world and has sold more than 80 million albums, described the importance of organic food to them. Rudolf Schenker, guitarist of the Scorpions, compared Wolpertshausen to Woodstock. In his opinion, Wolpertshausen’s message “Love and Peace for Nature” has the potential to change the world just like Woodstock did back in 1969.

Several “Green Heroes” of the global organic movement, like Vandana Shiva and Canadian farmer Percy Schmeiser, who have both been awarded with the Right Livelihood Award (often called the Alternative Nobel Prize), spoke at the accompanying ROCK FOR NATURE FORUM as well as on the main stage. Vandana Shiva talked of her fight for a genetic engineering free India, Percy Schmeiser spoke about his fight against Monsanto, an agricultural biotechnology corporation and leading producer of genetically engineered seed.

Influential international organisations, including IFOAM, Nature Life International, Slow Food, German Nature Conservation Association (NABU) and many more, were also present. Gerald A. Herrmann, past IFOAM president, called upon the visitors to make their own contribution and to consume organic food, which is produced without the use of genetically engineered seed, and which helps protect the soil, water and climate.

One of the most touching moments of the whole festival was when Vandana Shiva, Percy Schmeiser, and festival initiator Rudolf Buehler came on stage and spoke in front of 30,000 visitors. Schmeiser explained how genetic engineering will destroy agriculture if we do not start fighting against it now. Shiva described the “lethal risk genetic engineering poses upon

health and environment.” Moreover, she referred to the more than 200,000 Indian small holder farmers, who committed suicide after they had lost their economic future due to the proliferation of genetically modified cotton. Rudolf Buehler declared that “a whole movement of peaceful resistance against genetic engineering had its takeoff on the festival grounds.” A manifest, which has become known as the “Hohenlohe Manifest”, was formed to officially spread the message “Love and Peace for Nature” throughout the world. The festival visitors expressed their approval of this manifest to a thunderous applause.

Some of the money generated through tickets sales will be given to a good cause. In fact, 5 Euros of the full festival ticket and 2 Euros of each daily ticket sold will be contributed to Vandana Shiva’s endowment fund called “Seeds of Hope”. This fund supports farmers’ projects and her fight against genetic engineering. The festival organiser, producer association BESH, was happy to make this contribution as it benefits smallholder farmers in India. BESH was founded in the south-west German region of Hohenlohe in 1988. Local farmers emphasise that they are responsible for their livestock and the environment while also having a responsibility to produce the highest quality food for consumers. They raise local, stress resistant breeds of pigs – a species that had been in danger of extinction – and cattle and make sure they never use genetically engineered feed or growth hormones. Already about 15% of BESH members have converted their farms to organic management. Over the years, BESH and their founder and chairman Rudolf Buehler have become well-known far beyond the Hohenlohe region.

To guarantee the success of the festival, almost all the people in the region were involved in its organisation. More than 800 volunteers, the local population as well as local authorities and the media contributed to the success of the festival. BESH provided the 70,000 visitors with GMO free, organic and regional food. Bioland, Demeter and Ecoland certified food could be purchased at various food stalls. Local breweries, such as Haller Loewenbraeu with a special organic brew, and local food companies like Dorfkaeserei Geifertshofen, were amongst the sponsors. Moreover, the field where the festival was held had, only a couple of days earlier, been grown with organic wheat. The harvested 60 tons of wheat were then used to bake bread that was sold at the festival.

Rock for Nature also set a standard with carbon offsetting. It is estimated that the festival created around 2,500 tons of carbon dioxide. However, all emissions resulting from the arrivals of artists and visitors, as well as their energy consumption during the festival, e.g. for the lighting and sound system, will be offset. The offsetting will be conducted by the Dutch company, Soil & More, which is active in the setting-up and management of large scale organic composting sites in overseas countries as well as in carbon dioxide emission reduction and carbon assessment projects. These activities, as well as the festival, itself will be certified by TÜV Nord Group.

All in all, the festival was a fantastic success! All organisers, initiator Rudolf Buehler, as well as the more than 70,000 visitors, were exhilarated by their experience. The message against genetic engineering will definitely be carried far beyond the festival boundaries. Even the light rain on Friday and Saturday nights had no chance of diminishing the amazing atmosphere felt over the whole festival grounds.

Too bad, such an enormous event cannot take place every year!

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