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GOVERNING RISK IN GM AGRICULTURE

This book addresses the issues and methods involved in governing risks posed by genetically modified (GM) agriculture. It examines the evolution of policies intended to ensure the safety of GM crops and food products in the United States and Europe, and the regulatory approaches and other social controls employed to protect human health, the environment, conventional farming and foods, and the interests and rights of consumers.

Discussion encompasses the cultural, political, and economic forces that shape the design and application of the methods of risk governance, as well as other contextual features such as the influence of multinational companies seeking acceptance of their GM ventures. This discussion also examines the influence of the dynamic public discourse fostered by progressive concepts of risk governance and the approaches taken to meet its demands for transparency, public participation, and appropriate consideration of public perceptions and values despite conflicting views of experts.

Michael Baram is Professor Emeritus at Boston University School of Law. He is the author of seven books and more than 110 articles on the social control of hazardous technologies in the United States and Europe. His research, publications, and legal and advisory activities have dealt with regulation, liability, and industrial management of risks to public and worker health and safety and the environment in several technological sectors.

Mathilde Bourrier is Professor of Sociology at the University of Geneva, Switzerland. She is the author of three books and has published numerous articles in international journals. Her research, publications, and advisory activities deal with the social construction of safety, safety management, and organizational reliability in medical, nuclear, and other technological risk sectors.

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Governing Risk in GM Agriculture

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Preface

New technologies may provide a vast array of societal benefits but may also threaten established interests and values, and human and environmental well-being. Thus, modern democratic societies strive to address their potential, reduce uncertainties, exploit their benefits, and minimize risks by a variety of means. Such is the case with the introduction of perhaps the most challenging technology of all, biotechnology, which provides methods of genetic manipulation that are being introduced into the agricultural and food systems of nations across the globe.

This book aims to illuminate the issues and methods involved in addressing the uncertainties and risks of genetically modified (GM) agriculture. It therefore deals with the evolution of policies intended to ensure the safety of GM crops and food products, and the diverse regulatory approaches and other social controls they employ to protect human health, the environment, conventional farming and foods, and the interests and rights of consumers.

Discussion of the policies encompasses cultural, political, and economic forces that shape their design and application, as well as other contextual features such as the influence of multinational companies seeking acceptance of their GM ventures. This discussion also examines the influence of the dynamic public discourse that is fostered by progressive concepts of risk governance, and approaches taken to meet its demands for transparency, public participation, and appropriate consideration of public perceptions and values despite conflicting views of experts.

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The contributors to this book were brought together and encouraged to undertake this multidisciplinary effort by the late Professor Bernhard Wilpert of the Technical University of Berlin. Our efforts were carried out under the aegis of NeTWork, an international consortium of faculty and professionals from various organizations and disciplines that he conceived and directed for twenty-six years. Over this period, NeTWork activities have led to many workshops and publications on issues arising from the introduction of new technologies and methods of analysis and social control, including the publication of fourteen books, six special issues of professional journals, and numerous papers by the many participants inspired by their involvement in NeTWork. Further NeTWork activities are under the direction of Professor Gudela Grote, Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH-Zurich); Professor Mathilde Bourrier, University of Geneva; Dr. Babette Fahlbruch, TUV Nord (Berlin); and Dr. Gilles Motet of the Fondation pour une Culture de Securite Industrielle (Toulouse).

The coeditors wish to gratefully acknowledge the support of Professor Wilpert and his staff at the Technical University of Berlin, and the several organizations that provided the resources needed to sustain NeTWork over the years: the Werner Reimers Foundation (Bad Homburg), the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme (Paris), Eindhoven University, the Technical University of Berlin, the Netherlands Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, and now the Fondation pour une Culture de Securite Industrielle (Toulouse).

Finally, we dedicate this book to the memory of our distinguished colleague and humanistic mentor, Bernhard Wilpert.

Professors Michael Baram and Mathilde Bourrier

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