



The Nature Institute

Dear Friends,

It is hard to find an area of life today that does not provoke troubled introspection—we need only think of the strife in the Middle East, the refugee crisis in Europe, or the current political season in the United States. The question arises, “What am I doing to make a difference in a challenging and unhealthy environment?” The same question is posed for issues more closely related to the scientific research and educational work of The Nature Institute: genetically modified organisms (including humans), global warming, environmental pollution of various sorts, and the rapidly inflating, often grotesque dreams of synthetic biologists—these, too, force us to ask, “What are we doing to oppose destructive tendencies and promote the welfare of humanity and the planet as a whole? Where is our *activism*?”

One answer is that it doesn't exist. We are not protesting and marching, not sponsoring letter-writing campaigns, not pushing for this or that piece of legislation, not even (at least as a central focus) writing in direct support of activist campaigns. Are we, then, abdicating our responsibilities as citizens of this country and the global community?

Some might say so. But we would like to think there is another answer to the question about our activism. There is, after all, not much use in fighting against a disease if one doesn't know what sort of disease it is, what causes it, and what might tend toward its healing. A massively organized campaign to secure a piece of legislation might, by sheer reason of its funding and the effective mobilization of concerned citizens, achieve temporary success in blocking, for example, a particularly reckless project to engineer genetically modified organisms. And we, for our part, are intensely grateful that there are those willing to support such efforts with their pocketbooks and their time. Without their dedication, our society might be overwhelmed so quickly with unexpected difficulties that there would be no time to encourage new attitudes rooted in appreciation for the intrinsic value of all living beings.

But this raises the question where those healthier attitudes might come from. What long-term good can be achieved by a temporary legislative victory regarding genetically modified organisms if the society at large remains unable to see organisms as anything other than harvestable resources and objects for technological manipulation? The insults these organisms must endure will be endless—and holding back the tide of insults will ultimately be impossible—unless an understanding of the lives of organisms can be attained such that they themselves begin to inspire a respect for their ways of being and their needs.

There are, of course, many ways to attack this fundamental problem. But we would like to think that our work, as exemplified in this issue, illustrates at least two or three of those ways. This may not be activism in the most common sense, but we hope it serves an essential need of those “manning the barricades,” as well as of the larger public. After all, we need—all of us together—to come to an ever deeper understanding of what we are fighting for.

Craig Holdrege

Steve Talbott

STAFF

Linda Bolluyt
Colleen Cordes
Bruno Follador
Craig Holdrege
Henrike Holdrege
Veronica Madey
Stephen L. Talbott

ADJUNCT RESEARCHERS/FACULTY

Jon McAlice
Marisha Plotnik
Vladislav Rozentuller
Nathaniel Williams
Johannes Wirz

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

John Barnes
Siral Crane
Douglas Feick
Craig Holdrege
Henrike Holdrege
Marisha Plotnik
Jan Kees Saltet
Signe Schaefer
Jeffrey Sexton
Douglas Sloan
Nathaniel Williams

BOARD OF ADVISORS

Will Brinton
Ruth Hubbard
Gertrude Reif Hughes
Wes Jackson
Andrew Kimbrell
Fred Kirschenmann
Johannes Köhl
George Russell
Langdon Winner
Arthur Zajonc

In Context

Copyright 2016 The Nature Institute.

EDITOR: Stephen L. Talbott

LAYOUT: Mary Giddens

Copies of *In Context* are free while the supply lasts. All issues are posted on the Institute website. Our *NetFuture* newsletter is available at: <http://netfuture.org>.

The Nature Institute
20 May Hill Road
Ghent, New York 12075
Tel.: 518-672-0116
Fax: 518-672-4270
Email: info@natureinstitute.org
Web: <http://natureinstitute.org>

The Nature Institute, Inc., is a non-profit organization recognized as tax-exempt by the IRS under section 501(c)(3).