CROP BIOTECH UPDATE

A weekly summary of world developments in agri-biotech for developing countries, produced by the Global Knowledge Center on Crop Biotechnology, International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications SEAsiaCenter (ISAAA), and AgBiotechNet

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INDIA BUDGETS FOR BIOTECH

The Union Minister for Finance in India has, for the first time, given specific thrust to advance biotechnology in the country. The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) said that the Union Minister's presentation of the 2004-05 budget emphasized that science and technology, including biotechnology, "will receive priority and will be provided with additional funds."

A specific provision was for companies doing scientific research and development and approved by the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research before April 1, 2004 to be entitled to 100% deduction of profits for 10 years. FICCI noted that this will favor small and medium biotechnology companies who can channel savings to augment R & D activities.

For more information, email Bhagirath Choudhary, assistant director for biotechnology in FICCI, at bhagirath@ficci.com or biotech@ficci.com.

INDIA'S NEW BIOTECH POLICY

In the next six months, India is said to announce its new policy on biotechnology. This was according to Biotechnology Secretary M.K. Bhan, as cited by Kerala.com, during the Bio 2004 - an international conference that was held in Bangalore, and attended by approximately 300 delegates from India and abroad.

According to Bhan, the new policy will provide the framework for the research and business institutions, and illustrate the trade and investment guidelines for the newly emerging biotech sector.

Says Bhan, "A group of experts will also be set up to suggest models for public-private partnerships in the biotech sector. The biotechnology department will invest in the creation of innovation centres within the existing academic and research institutions." To date, Delhi University has been identified to be the first center to receive the funding. Other cities such as Hyderabad, Pune, Chennai, Ahmedabad and Lucknow will also be the focus of the development.

Download more news on India at the Kerala.com website at http://kerala.com/.

Based on a related news story, Vision Group Chairperson, Kiran Mazumdar Shaw, stated that the booming biotech industry has the potential to attract investments worth $250 million - and this is in Karnataka alone. Shaw, however, stated that despite this positive figure, the biotech industry in India still has a long way to go in terms of funding, government support and regulatory issues.

As of 2003, total revenues from the biotech sector of India was at $750 million - out of which Karnataka's revenues stood at $300 million. Shaw added that Bangalore is currently being eyed for development by at least 17 biotech companies.

Read the news release at http://www.ciol.com/content/news/2004/104071204.asp.

ESA REPORT ON BIOTECH RESEARCH CAPACITY

The Agricultural and Development Economics Division (ESA) of the Economic and Social Department of United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) recently published a working paper on National Agricultural Biotechnology Research Capacity in Developing Countries. The report is based on a survey conducted to determine the current levels of biotechnology research capacity in China, Colombia, Indonesia, Kenya, Mexico, and Zimbabwe.

Results of the study showed that most of the research institutions in these countries are in the initial stages of developing biotechnology research capacity. The proportion of biotechnology expenditures to the total agricultural research expenditures is very small, and most of these supports are coming from the public sector.

The report discusses the importance of secured and sustained public research capacity- including physical, human and financial, in the successful development of biotechnology innovations. For instance, countries like China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Argentina, Brazil and Bulgaria have made significant investments in biotechnology research and regulation. Experience with genetically modified organism (GMO) testing for a wide array of locally important traits, and commercialization in these countries is growing, and government support programs and policies actively encourage biotechnology R&D.

The full copy of this paper can be accessed online at http://www.fao.org/es/esa

GM PLANTS TO BE USED TO CREATE VACCINES

According to BBC News, genetically modified (GM) plants will soon be used to grow vaccines against rabies and AIDS. Termed as “pharming,” this technology allows medicines (injectibles and oral vaccines) to be grown in plants. Professor Julian Ma of the St George's Hospital Medical School in London, and the scientific coordinator of the project, stated that the technique to create such plants will take two years to be developed before the first crop can be grown, as scheduled, in 2006. While clinical trials of the first vaccine derived from GM plants are planned to take place in 2009.

Says Professor Ma, "Plants are inexpensive to grow and if we were to engineer them to contain a gene for a pharmaceutical product they could produce large quantities of drugs or vaccine at low cost.” At present, the European Union (EU) has awarded £8.6m to a pan-European consortium of scientists who are keen on developing the said technology.

The news release from BBC is available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/3887517.stm.

ETHIOPIA DRAFTS AGRI-BIOTECH DOCUMENTS

According to the Ethiopian Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MoARD), a document on agricultural biotechnology has been recently drafted. State Minister Belay Ejigu said the Ministry prepared the document for biotechnology to help bridge the gap in competition by promoting the challenges in agricultural production. The Minister also stated that the government is committed to support and promote biotechnology capacity building endeavors to enable Ethiopia to break out of the vicious circle of poverty.

The State Minister added that the participants of the workshop are expected to identify and appreciate the potentials and limitations of agricultural biotechnology development of the country in order to assess and enrich the draft document. Experts in the sector are required to formulate priority interventions and potential research and development projects based on the existing realities of the country.

Belay added that the adoption of this technology obviously lies with the national research and extension system. The workshop discussed, among others, biotechnology policies and strategy of Ethiopia, biosafety regime for the development of biotechnologies, the role of higher learning institutions for capacity building in agricultural biotechnology, and how to share experiences on agricultural biotech research and development. / Kenya Biotechnology Information Center

INDIA AND U.S. SIGN BIOTECH LETTER OF INTENT

India's Department of Biotechnology (DPT) and the United States for International Development have signed a letter of intent to initiate enhanced

cooperation in agricultural biotechnology research and development. The partnership will pursue agri-biotech research projects including technology development, technology diffusion, biosafety and related policy activities. In addition, joint workshops, conferences, scientific exchanges and training of scientists will also be done.

The program will increase "the range of safe and environmentally sound technological options to producers and consumers of agricultural products." Visit the Department of Biotechnology's website at http://www.dbtindia.nic.in.

GM CROP ACREAGE IN THE US TO INCREASE IN 2004

The acreage planted to genetically modified (GM) crops in the US is envisioned to increase in 2004. This is according to the National Agricultural Statistics Service, of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) in Washington, DC in the US. Herbicide resistant soybean is expected to increase to 85 % in 2004. While, the total percentage of GM cotton is also predicted to rise to 76%. GM corn will also rise further to 45%. On the other hand, wheat acreage is expected to drop by 3 percent from its 2003 figure.

Corn planted area for all purposes is estimated at 81 million acres, and growers are expected to harvest 73.4 million acres for grain. The 2004 soybean planted area is estimated at 74.8 million acres, up by 2 percent from its 2003 figure, and is foreseen to be the largest planted area on record if this materializes. Area for harvest also increased by 2 percent - 73.7 million acres. All cotton plantings are also expected to total 13.9 million acres, 3 percent above the 2003 figure.

On the other hand, all wheat planted area is estimated at 59.9 million acres, down by 3 percent from 2003, and harvested area is expected to total 50.7 million acres (4 percent decrease).

The report is available at
http://usda.mannlib.cornell.edu/reports/nassr/field/pcp-bba/acrg0604.txt

ANNOUNCEMENTS

PK 8, MYTHS & FACTS BOOKLET, NOW IN FRENCH

Pocket K No. 8 which discusses the Cartagena Protocol, and the Myths & Facts which focuses on the July 30, 2001 recommendations of the New Zealand Royal Commission on Genetic Modification (RCGM) are the newly released publications in French of the International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-Biotech Applications-Global Knowledge Center on Crop Biotechnology. Download these new publications at http://www.isaaa.org/kc.

NEW CB BRIEF

Augusto de Leon, Abraham Manalo, and Fe Cielo Guilatco's study entitled “The Cost Implications of GM Food Labeling in the Philippines,” is the latest CB (Crop Biotech) Brief from the Global Knowledge Center on Crop Biotechnology of

the International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications (ISAAA-KC). Downloadable at http://www.isaaa.org/kc, De Leon and colleagues analyzes the different issues and concerns accorded GM labeling in the Philippines.

GMO SYMPOSIUM

The 8th International Symposium on the Biosafety of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) will take place on September 26 to 30, 2004, in Montpellier, France. More details can be accessed at http://www.inra.fr/gmobiosafety/ or at http://www.inra.fr/gmobiosafety/posterandspeakers.php. The secretariat can also be emailed at isbgmo@versailles.inra.fr. Fax (+33 1 30 83 37 28) or phone (+33 1 30 83 37 30) inquiries are also welcome.

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