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)

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USDA APPLAUDS INDIA COTTON CROP

A recently released report by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) predicts that if India's cotton production continues to increase at the same rate as it has in the past two years, the country will surpass the United States as the second largest cotton producer in the world behind China.

Using data collected from India's main cotton producing states, the report shows that not only did areas planted to cotton increase, but yields also surpassed those of the United States' 10-year average of 17.9 million bales. The report also acknowledges that adoption of Bt cotton in India contributed largely to the steady increase in cotton crop yields.

In the meantime, India's Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC) recently allowed JK Agri-Genetics Ltd, Syngenta Seeds India Ltd, and Nath Seeds Ltd to carry out large-scale trials of their genetically modified (GM) cotton hybrids in the coming planting season.

JK Agri's variety, "JKCH-1947 Bt," contains a modified cry1Ac gene construct developed by a team of scientists at the Indian Institute of Technology in Kharagpur. On the other hand, Nath Seeds uses a fusion cry1Ac/cry1Ab Bt gene sourced from the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences for their "NCEH-6R Bt" variety. Sygenta's

“02-50 Vip” relies on the action of VIP, or the vegetative insecticidal protein. VIP’s are also lethal to borers, and are derived from Bacillus thuringiensis. However, they are isolated from bacteria during vegetative growth, unlike the cry proteins, which are found in the reproductive or sporulating phase.

The USDA report is available at http://www.fas.usda.gov/pecad/highlights/2005/04/india_web_update.pdf.Read the complete article, “Nod for large-scale Bt cotton trials of JK, Nath Seeds, Syngenta,” in http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/2005/04/15/stories/2005041501371000.htm.

EUROPE SPENDING LESS ON BIOTECH

Europe and the United States have the same number of companies but the US biotechnology industry employs twice as many people, spends almost three times as much on research and development, raises three or four times as much venture capital, and has access to four times as much to debt finance. In Europe, however, more new companies are being set up. These were some of the findings of a comprehensive study comparing the biotech industry across some 15 European nations and the USA presented by Critical 1, an industry specialist consultancy for biotechnology, at the World Life Sciences Forum BioVision, Lyon, France.

The study further revealed that the financing gap is a significant barrier for the European biotech industry, particularly the lack of suitable financial infrastructure later in the business cycle. The collapse of many enterprises after three to five years is attributed to this problem.

See the report at http://www.europabio.org/events/BioVision/CriticalI-%20EB%20press%20release%20130405%20FINAL.doc

UN CALLS FOR MORE SUPPORT FOR S & T, AGRICULTURE

Research and development need more support to further address poverty-related problems in agriculture, as well as in health, natural resource and environmental management, energy, and climate. This was forwarded by a United Nations special report entitled “In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all" by Secretary General Kofi Annan. It also stated that worldwide support can bring about economic development and enable developing countries to devise solutions to their own problems.

For agriculture and the environment, increasing food output and incomes and natural resource management were recommended. In line with these, the report proposed

several activities such as forest replanting, policy reforms, training in farm practices, and improved access to transport, water, sanitation, and modern energy services.

The other highlighted areas for emphasis were agricultural research, biodiversity, climate change, desertification, equitable trading systems, increasing food output and income, and science and technology for development.

Two particular priorities for science and technology were presented. The first is to "mount a major global initiative" on tropical diseases research, and second, to provide additional support to the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) for its researches on tropical agriculture.

The report will be part of the Millennium Review Summit on September 2005, which will evaluate the progress of attaining the Millennium Development Goals.

See CGIAR's Story of the Month at www.cgiar.org/monthlystory/april2005.html, and the UN report at http://www.un.org/largerfreedom.

AGCARE MEETING EXPLORES COMMUNICATION ANGLE

"Communicating with Consumers: What is the cost of doing nothing?" was the general theme for the recently concluded AGCare annual general meeting, co-hosted with the Ontario Farm Animal Council (OFAC), in Guelph, Ontario, Canada. With panelists and journalists making up the panel, and talk centering on how agriculture is depicted in the media, the meeting sent off its 150 participants with the message: If you don't tell your own story, someone else will, and it won't be the story you wish to portray.

For instance, Andrew Casey, Vice President of Government Relations and Communications for the Forest Products Association of Canada, reported that in 1995 the forestry industry was relatively unpopular, with 33% of the public deeming the industry "unfavorable," 38% finding it "favorable," and the rest rating it "neutral". With effective campaigning, including television spots featuring people in the industry and their passion for their role as forest stewards, a second survey showed that 58% of the public found the industry "favorable," with only 18% stating the industry was "unfavorable".

Read the complete article at
http://www.agcare.org/new.cfm?keyissueid=4&documentid=293

EC LISTS ACCEPTED GM PRODUCTS

The European Commission (EC) has recently released a list of 26 genetically modified (GM) products that have legally been on the European market, even before the European Union's (EU) new legislative framework for authorizing GM food and feed went into effect. The list aims to clarify exactly which GM products are legally permitted to be sold in the EU, and includes products that may continue to be marketed because they fulfilled the notification requirements under Regulation (EC) No 1829/2003.

The list numbers 12 varieties of maize, 6 of oilseed rape, 5 of cotton and one of soybean, one biomass and one yeast cream. Existing products on the EC register are subject to the strict labeling and traceability rules for all GMOs under new EU legislation.

Since Regulation 1829/2003's implementation, all GM food and feed seeking to enter the EU market have to undergo thorough safety assessments. Once on the market and in the EC register, existing products can be sold for 3-9 years, and may stay for a much longer time if an application for renewal of the authorization is submitted.

View the list at http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/food/biotechnology/authorisation/register_notification/index.htm, and read the article at http://www.eubusiness.com/topics/Food/gm.2005-04-18

MARDI PAPAYA WINS GOLD MEDAL

A research team at the Malaysian Agriculture Research and Development Institute (MARDI) recently won a gold medal for their work on Papaya Ringspot Virus (PRSV) Resistant Papaya. MARDI won a total of 10 awards at the recent 33rd International Products and Innovation of New Techniques Exhibition in Geneva, carrying home 4 gold medals, 5 silver, and 1 bronze.

The study, "Papaya ringspot virus resistant Eksotika papaya for the industry," was headed by Dr. Vilasini Pilai. PRSV has destroyed many papaya-growing farms in Johor, Malaysia's largest papaya-growing state. This new PRSV-resistant papaya is of the Eksotika variety, which which Malaysia exports mainly to China and Hong Kong.

For more information, visit www.mardi.my and read about the awards at http://www.mardi.my/main.php?Content=articles&ArticleID=80. For the complete news article, read http://www.nst.com.my/Current_News/NST/Wednesday/National/NST32315973.txt/Article/indexb_html.

FAO COAG SESSION FOCUSES ON GOOD, SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

Good agricultural practices (GAP) and sustainable agriculture and rural development (SARD) were two of the foremost issues tackled during the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Committee on Agriculture (COAG) nineteenth session last April 13-16, 2005. Three program thrusts were recommended for implementation in 2006-2007 and beyond. These were sustainable livelihoods, sustainable intensification of integrated production systems, and integrated natural resource management.

Food safety and globalization in the livestock sector were also high on the session's agenda. The other matters included the introduction of an international portal, preparedness for nuclear emergencies, bioenergy, sustainable livelihoods approaches (SLAs), and water desalinisation for agricultural applications, among others.

The session was held in Rome and attended by delegates from over 70 countries.

For more details, see http://www.fao.org/ag.

CBT NEWS FEATURE: The International Institute for Tropical Agriculture (IITA)

The International Institute for Tropical Agriculture (IITA)

Founded in 1967, the International Institute for Tropical Agriculture (IITA) was the first African research center linked to the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), with a mandate to improve food production and develop sustainable production systems in humid tropics.

It is led by an international board of trustees and staffed by scientists and professionals from more than 30 countries with headquarters in Ibadan, Nigeria. It operates in Benin, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Uganda, and in several Sub-Saharan countries.

The Institute’s mission is to enhance food security, income, and well-being of resource-poor people in Sub-Saharan Africa, through research and related activities aimed to increase agricultural production, improve food systems, and sustainably manage natural resources. They work with national and international stakeholders.

IITA directs researches, germplasm conservation, trainings, and information exchange activities alongside regional and national programs, as well as with universities, nongovernment organizations (NGOs), and the private sector. It focuses on small holder cropping and post harvest systems, and on the crops cassava, cowpea, maize, plantain and banana, soybean, and yam.

IITA is a part of major networks such as the West and Central Africa Maize Network (WECAMAN), Southern Africa Root Crops Research Network (SARRNET), East Africa Root Crops Research Network (EARRNET), Alley Farming Network for Tropical Africa (AFNETA), and thee Soil and Plant Analytical Laboratories Network of Africa (SPALNA) among others. Meanwhile, some of its partner NGOs include the Sasakawa Africa Association (SAA) based in Tokyo, Japan; Rotary Clubs in Ghana, Togo, Benin, France, and USA; and the World Vision International (WVI). It is actively involved with the CGIAR-related partnerships Systemwide Program on Integrated Pest Management (SP-IPM), Systemwide Information Network for Genetic Resources (SINGER), Consortium for Spatial Information (CSI), and International Crop Information System (ICIS). IITA is also working with National Agricultural Research Systems (NARS) collaborators among over 40 African countries.

Two of the most recent breakthroughs from IITA are the production of disease resistant cassava varieties, and a biopesticide called Green Muscle ™, using a naturally occurring fungus, Metarhizium anisopliae, which affects only locusts and grasshoppers.

For more information on the institute, see http://www.iita.org and http://www.cgiar.org.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

ECB 12 SLATED FOR AUGUST

The 12th European Congress on Biotechnology will be held on August 21-24, 2005 at the Technical University of Denmark, north of Copenhagen.

With the theme "Bringing Genomes to Life," the congress will tackle topics in systems biology, functional and comparative genomics, cellular signaling, and stem cells and cloning. All fields of biotechnology will also be discussed, including industrial biotechnology, pharmaceutical biotechnology, food and feed biotechnology, environmental biotechnology, biotechnology education, ethics, the role of women in biotech, and global life sciences.

The congress is organized by the Danish Biotechnology Forum, Danish Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, and Medicon Valley Academy, on behalf of the European Federation of Biotechnology.

For more information, contact the Secretariat at lhp@bio.auc.dk, or visit http://www.ecb12.dk

NEW JOURNAL ANNOUNCED

The Journal of Food Law and Policy is a newly-established, student-edited legal journal devoted to the study of food law and its impact on society. It will be released biannually, and will be edited by some of the top students at the University Of Arkansas School Of Law.

The journal is now accepting submissions and subscriptions. Its first edition will be published in spring, 2005. Future publications will include articles on international food safety laws and regulations, the legal effects of food technology, traceability issues, labeling requirements, and a wide variety of other dynamic issues.

To submit your article, please send a copy to the Editor-in-Chief at foodlaw@uark.edu. For more information, visit http://law.uark.edu/student/orgs/foodlaw/index.htm

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