

GMObserver is a regular electronic newsletter looking at recent developments in plant biotechnology relevant to Europe. Compiled by ABE (Agricultural Biotechnology in Europe), it provides a summary of externally sourced news and current events in a short, easy to read format. It is available for free by email or on the ABE website at www.abeeurope.info.

Further proof that food products from GM-fed animals are equivalent to conventional counterparts

According to a recent study by the Council for Agricultural Science & Technology (CAST), an international consortium of 38 scientific and professional societies, products from Genetically Modified (GM) fed animal are sources of high-quality food and are equivalent to their conventional counterparts. Written and evaluated by international scientists - from the United Kingdom, Germany, the United States and Brazil - the report represents an important contribution to the scientific literature on consuming foods from animals fed GM crops, providing further evidence of the benefits of these products. *"Results of the most up-to-date research compiled by this international Task Force conclude that meat, milk, and eggs produced by farm animals fed biotechnology-derived crops are as wholesome, safe, and nutritious as similar products produced by animals fed conventional crops"*, says Dr. John M. Bonner, CAST Executive Vice President. CAST's new Issue Paper concludes with several important points for future research and action to ensure continued safety and nutritive value of feeds in current and future crops derived from modern biotechnology.

For more information: <http://www.cast-science.org/>

View

"Meat, milk and eggs produced by farm animals fed biotechnology-derived crops are as wholesome, safe, and nutritious as similar products produced by animals fed conventional crops".

Dr. John Bonner
Council for Agricultural
Science & Technology
(CAST)

Bt Maize planted in 2005 boosted yields and grain quality in Spain

A recently released study carried out by scientists at the Spanish Institute of Agro-Food Research and Technology (IRTA), based in Catalonia, surveyed the outcome of the approximately 53 000 hectares of *Bt* maize grown in the country in 2005. Its conclusions highlighted the fact that *Bt* maize planted in 2005 not only boosted yield for Spanish farmers - those who chose to grow GM varieties also enjoyed higher grain quality, even in critical areas such as grain moisture and contamination with dangerous mycotoxins: *Bt* maize had 83% less mycotoxins than conventional maize. *Bt* maize used in Spain yielded on average 7.3% more grain than plantings using conventional production systems. Furthermore, the report also noted the cost benefits to the farmers and the benefit to the environment by no longer needing to spray insecticides for corn borer control. The report also confirmed that a buffer strip of 15-20 metres between GM and conventional maize plantings is enough to keep GM presence in the conventional field below 0.9%, as required by EU regulations.

For more information: <http://www.gmo-compass.org/eng/news/messages/200607.docu.html#38>

French farmers mobilized to support innovation in French agriculture

More than two thousand French farmers marched through the South-West town of Pau on 20 September to protest against attacks on genetically modified (GMO) crops, bans on pesticides and irrigation curbs. Many GM crops fields (both trials and commercial crops owned by farmers) were destroyed by anti-GM activists during the summer. The head of the Association of Maize Grower in France (Association Générale des Producteurs de Maïs - AGPM), Christophe Terrain, said that the aim was *"to channel the anger felt by some farmers"* faced with a threat to their livelihoods. This mobilisation confirmed that French maize farmers are increasingly embracing plant biotechnology, with a boom from 500 hectares to 5 000 hectares in 2006. It is expected that French farmers will grow at least between 10 000 and 15 000 hectares of *Bt* maize in 2007.

For more information: <http://www.planetark.org/dailynewsstory.cfm/newsid/38190/story.htm>



EU NEWS

European Parliament discussed the benefits of plant biotechnology

Biotechnology has a great deal to offer the agricultural sector and more needs to be done to help the public understand the benefits of plant biotechnology. This was the main message from a public hearing on the prospects and challenges for biotechnology in European agriculture, held in the European Parliament on Tuesday 10 October. The European Parliament was hearing a panel of scientists who outlined some of the advantages biotechnology offers to the agricultural sector in Europe prior to the publication of a EP report on this issue. They mentioned a range of benefits from pest resistant crops to plants with enhanced nutritional values. Renate Sommer, a German Member of the European Parliament from the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) stated that Europe should allow *"farmers, industry and consumers access to safe and beneficial biotech products,"* in a letter published in a leading EU newspaper following the hearing.

For more information: http://cordis.europa.eu/search/index.cfm?fuseaction=news.simpledocument&N_RCN=26487

Trial of GM potatoes could be grown in the UK

A company has asked for permission to grow the first trial crop of genetically modified (GM) potatoes in the UK. Scientists have used genes found in wild potatoes resistant to the fungal disease, which destroyed Ireland's potato crop in the 1840s famine, and spliced them into a commercial potato variety. The trials would be conducted according to the UK Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) guidelines if the go-ahead is given. The National Institute of Agricultural Botany (NIAB) based at Huntingdon Road, Cambridge, could begin planting the genetically modified potatoes at the start of the growing season in April or May of next year. If the UK GM trials is judged a success after four years, it is estimated it would take another three to four years before a final variety will be available for public sale. The commercialisation of this variety of potatoes means farmers could avoid losses of up to £50 millions (€74.7 millions) a year through damaged crops.

For more information: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/5277152.stm>

GM crops planting will continue to increase in the next years

The next decade is set to see at least a doubling in global biotech crop availability, as countries become increasingly less sceptical and begin to see the benefits, according to the International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications (ISAAA), a non-profit organisation working on agricultural biotechnologies in developing countries. By 2015 it is estimated that the number of countries growing biotech crops will *"at least double"*, from 21 in 2005 to around 40. The number of biotech farmers around the world is forecast to increase from 8.5 million to 20 million, while the global area planted with genetically modified crops will increase from 222 millions acres (around 90 millions hectares) to 500 millions acres (around 202 millions hectares). The wide-scale adoption of plant biotechnology worldwide is said to have improved productivity and income, with yields during the period reporting an increase of between 5 and 40%, and total biotech crop production in 2005 reaching a value of \$50 billion (€39.6 billion).

For more information: http://www.checkbiotech.org/root/index.cfm?fuseaction=search&search=isaaa&doc_id=13553&start=1&fullsearch=0

Half of 2006-2007 soybean crop in Brazil projected to be GM

At least 50% of soybean crops in the 2006-2007 season will be genetically modified, said Amelio Dall Agnol, a researcher at Brazil's top crop science institute, Embrapa. During the 2005-2006 season, some 9 million hectares of genetically modified soybeans were planted out of a total 22 million. This season should see an additional 2 million hectares of genetically modified soy added, Agnol said, following last years ruling by the government that permitted GM soy to be planted. Brazil soy growers are expected to plant under 21 million hectares of soy during the 2006-2007 season. *"From what we hear in talks with farmers and cooperatives, all signs are pointing to a big increase in GM soy,"* Agnol said. Farmers use genetically modified soybeans to control the spread of weeds in soy fields, thus reducing herbicide costs and increasing yield.

For more information: http://www.checkbiotech.org/root/index.cfm?fuseaction=search&search=brazil&doc_id=13614&start=1&fullsearch=0