



PRESS HANDOUT

Europe recognises the chances of Green Gene Technology

„**ABIC goes Europe**“ , Agricultural Biotechnology International Conference, now being held for the first time in Europe – Cologne, 12 - 15 September 2004

Cologne, February 11th 2004

For the seventh year in succession, farmers worldwide are expanding the acreage for transgenic crops at two-digit rates, whilst Europe continues to uphold the EU-wide moratorium imposed on genetically modified foods and plants in 1999. According to recent figures from the ISAAA, genetically modified crops were sown over a total of 67.7 million hectares in 2003 – an increase of 15% over the previous year. Among the leading cultivators are the USA, Argentina, Canada, Brazil, China and South Africa. With the sole exception of Bt-maize over 32,000 hectares Spain, Europe has been highly reluctant to make use of the new technology. But there are now signs that things are on the move.

Agricultural biotechnology has been recognised by the European Union as a chance to boost economic growth, employment and prosperity. Since the new gene technology regulations have come into force, the Commission is determined to ensure that they are put into practice. It is stepping up the pressure on hesitant member states to allow the authorisation of products from Bt11 maize and thereby put an end to the moratorium. Now that the moratorium seems likely to be lifted and the EU Regulations on the authorisation, labelling and traceability of genetically modified foods and feeds will be coming into force in April this year, new momentum has at last been given for green gene technology in Europe.

In this decisive year for agricultural biotechnology, the *ABIC (Agricultural Biotechnology International Conference)* is being held from 12 - 15 September 2004 for the very first time in Europe – at the Congress Centre in Cologne.

In this year of innovations, Germany will for the first time be acting as host country to one of the world's major conferences on plant biotechnology, to be held under the motto “*AgBiotech goes Europe*”. More than 1,000 persons are expected to attend.

Investors, industrial managers, scientists and policy makers from all over the world will come together in 2004 for an intensive exchange of experience with a view to giving new momentum to the development of agricultural biotechnology. Europe is eager to see what will emerge from this global forum of academic, economic and political experts.

The presentations and sessions will be concerned principally with economic consequences, the coexistence of transgenic cropping with other forms of cultivation, scientific progress in the genetic improvement of crops, and new opportunities opened up by the use of plant biotechnology for the energy, medical and food sectors. Objectively based discussions of the chances and risks with the general public during the ABIC 2004 in Cologne will help to spread wider understanding and acceptance of agricultural biotechnology.

The ABIC forum was set up in 1996 to discuss the results of research and development and facilitate joint ventures between research institutes and industrial partners. Until this year the conference was held once every two years in Canada. Host country for 2006 will be Australia. The organisation of ABIC 2004, for the first time outside Canada, was entrusted to Phytowelt GmbH in Nettetal.

Further information on ABIC 2004 can be found under: <http://www.abic2004.org>

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