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Plant Biotechnology Has Growth Potential in Europe

New study documents more food, lower production costs

Brussels June 30, 2003 — Biotechnology could help control diseases and pests that take a bite out of European-grown crops, resulting in more food production at lower costs and with less use of pesticides, according to a comprehensive study released at BIO 2003.

The three case studies compiled by the National Center for Food and Agricultural Policy (NCFAP) documented that crops developed through biotechnology can help farmers reap an additional 7.8 billion kilograms (17 billion pounds) of food and improve farm income over € 1 billion, while using 9.7 million fewer kilograms (21.7 million pounds) of pesticide.

"This is the first study that explains how biotechnology could impact Europe," said Leonard Gianessi, program director for NCFAP, a nonprofit, Washington-based research organization. "The potential impacts for Europe have not been quantified before."

The study shows that crops like Bt or insect resistant corn, currently planted in Spain on a small scale, have the potential to increase yields in Europe by 1.9 billion kilograms (4.2 billion pounds). Meanwhile, crops like biotech herbicide tolerant sugarbeets could significantly lower costs to growers, and a fungal resistant potato under development could reduce pesticide use by over 7.5 million kilograms (16.5 million pounds).

Conversely, if European growers did not want to increase overall production, they could reduce the amount of land in production. Said Gianessi, “We found that an area larger than Luxembourg or Rhode Island could be removed from production without any production loss due to higher yields on the remaining biotech acreage.”

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“These first few case studies show every country stands to benefit from development of the new varieties evaluated in this study,” Gianessi says.

Based on the initial findings, NCFAP researchers say that France would see the greatest production increase at 2.6 billion kilograms (5.7 billion pounds) and the greatest increase in income with a €265 million change, closely followed by Germany, which would also see income increase by over €200 million. Pesticide use would also go down, with Germany seeing the largest impact, a reduction of 2.8 million kilograms.

“In these three cases, biotechnology provides better control of harmful pests at reduced costs.” Gianessi said.

The release of the three case studies is the first in a series that NCFAP will release in the next year. The complete study will include 15 case studies of fruits, vegetables and field crops where biotechnology solutions to major pest problems are under development in Europe.

The case studies, which were reviewed by plant biotechnology experts from European academic and government institutions, are the most comprehensive evaluation of the potential impact on European agriculture of crops developed through biotechnology. The complete case studies are available on the Internet at www.ncfap.org. Monsanto, Syngenta and BIO funded the project.

The National Center for Food and Agricultural Policy is a private, nonprofit, non-advocacy research organization based in Washington, D.C. Originally established in 1984 at Resources for the Future, the center became an independent organization in 1992. NCFAP researchers conduct studies in four program areas: biotechnology, pesticides, U.S. farm and food policy, and international trade and development.

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