



For Immediate Release

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Global Status of Biotech

Johannesburg, South Africa: Jennifer Thomson, Director of ISAAA, spoke to the topic “Global Status of Biotech/GM Crops and Future Prospects to 2015,” at the opening session of the ABIC meeting in Johannesburg 6-9 September.

Adoption

2010 was the 15th anniversary of the commercialization of biotech crops - accumulated hectareage from 1996 to 2010 **exceeded 1 billion hectares for the first time** - that is equivalent to 8 times the total land area of South Africa (122 million hectares) – this signifies that biotech crops are here to stay. Biotech crops increased by a record 87-fold increase in hectareage between 1996 and 2010. This makes them the fastest adopted crop technology in the history of modern agriculture. Over 15 million farmers in 29 countries planted 148 million hectares of biotech crops - **South Africa was # 9 in the world, planting 2.2 million hectares of biotech maize, soybean and cotton.** South Africa has successfully grown about 10 million hectares of white and yellow maize in the 10 year period 2001 to 2010 and was the first country in Africa to plant biotech crops in 1998. Two other countries in Africa plant and benefit from biotech crops - **Burkina Faso grows an insect resistant cotton and Egypt grows an insect resistant maize.**

Worldwide, the **number of countries planting biotech crops soared to a record 29 in 2010.** Of the 29 biotech crop countries in 2010, 19 were developing and only 10 were industrial countries; in addition, another 30 imported biotech crop products for a total of 59 countries approving use of biotech crops, either for planting or importing. In 2010 of the record 15.4 million farmers who grew biotech crops, notably over 90%, or 14.4 million, were small resource-poor farmers in developing countries. Developing countries grew 48% of global biotech crops in 2010 and will exceed industrial countries hectareage before 2015. **The five lead biotech developing countries are China and India in Asia, Brazil and Argentina in Latin America, and South Africa on the continent of Africa.** Burkina Faso had the second largest proportional increase of biotech hectareage at 126%, with 80,000 farmers planting a record 260,000 hectares equivalent to a 65% adoption rate in 2010. In China, 6.5 million small farmers, cultivated, on average, less than one half of one hectare of Bt cotton, and in India, stellar growth continued for the ninth year, with 6.3 million farmers growing 9.4 million hectares of Bt cotton, equivalent to an 86% adoption rate. For the first time, biotech crops occupied a substantial 10% of the ~1.5 billion hectares of global cropland.

Benefits

In the period 1996 to 2009, biotech crops have contributed to Sustainability and Climate Change by: increasing crop production valued at US\$65 billion globally resulting in a better environment, by saving 393 million kgs a.i. of pesticides; in 2009 alone reducing CO₂ emissions by 18 billion kgs., equivalent to taking ~8 million cars off the road; conserving biodiversity by saving 75 million hectares of land; and alleviate poverty by helping 14.4 million small farmers, who are some of the poorest people in the world. **The value of biotech crops to South Africa over the period 1996 to 2009 was \$ 675 million and almost 150 million in 2009 alone.**

Regulation

Professor Thomson said that there is an **urgent need for appropriate cost/time-effective regulatory systems that are responsible, rigorous but not onerous, for small and poor developing countries, particularly in Africa**, where up to 10 countries could benefit from biotech crops by 2015. She stressed that whereas **biotech crops should not be viewed as a panacea, they are considered an essential element in ensuring future food security.**

Future Prospects

They look encouraging for the next five years: **number of biotech crop countries, farmers and hectares expected to double from 2006 to 2015**; drought tolerant maize in 2012/13 in the US and Canada, which hopefully could be available in Africa by around 2017. Golden Rice, rich in Vitamin A, is expected to be available in 2013; and Bt rice before the MDG of 2015. Biotech crops can make a significant contribution to the 2015 MDG goal of cutting poverty in half, by optimizing crop productivity in the developing countries.

For further information, contact:

Dr. Clive James
cjames@candw.ky

ABIC Foundation
muriel.adams@abic.ca

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International Service for the acquisition of Agri-Biotech Applications (ISAAA) is a small, responsive, non-bureaucratic, international network with three Centers in North America, Africa and Asia. The network is composed of the AfriCenter in Nairobi, Kenya; AmeriCenter in Cornell University, Ithaca, New York; and the SEAsiaCenter in Los Baños, Laguna, Philippines. ISAAA provides science-based knowledge to society on biotech/GM crops, to facilitate a more informed global discussion on their contribution to the alleviation of hunger and poverty which is the goal of ISAAA.

The ABIC Foundation and the Agricultural Biotechnology International Center (ABIC) are located in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada. ABIC Foundation's goal is to ensure ongoing opportunities for continuous learning and networking within the agbiotech community.