

abc is the umbrella group of the agricultural biotechnology industry in the UK. Our goal is to provide factual information about the agricultural use of GM technology in the UK.



ISAAA results: 13 million farmers can't be wrong

13.3 million farmers planted over 125 million hectares of GM crops in 25 countries during 2008, the 13th year of worldwide cultivation. The figures, published in February by the International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications (ISAAA), show that the global biotech crop area has continued to rise, growing by 9.4% (or 11 million hectares) in the last year. Countries growing GM crops for the first time include two from Africa; Burkina Faso (insect-resistant cotton) and Egypt (insect-resistant maize).

In 2008, seven of the 27 countries in the European Union officially planted Bt maize on a commercial basis on an area of 107,000 hectares.

Commenting on the news, abc Chairman Dr Julian Little said: "As the ISAAA figures show, more than 13 million farmers in 25 countries are using genetically modified crops to deliver more consistent and efficient yields of higher quality crops. Sadly, no GM crops of benefit to British farmers have been approved for cultivation in the past ten years, denying those who want to grow GM crops in this country the right to do so."

"Farmers, including those producing food and other raw materials here in the UK, need the freedom to choose modern and efficient high-yielding farming methods based on tried and tested science in order both to produce enough food and to safeguard our natural resources. Agricultural biotechnology, particularly the use of GM, can be a valuable part of achieving those objectives, helping us to grow crops in more productive, efficient and sustainable ways."

Concerns over food security prompt politicians to reaffirm GMOs as part of the solution

Speaking at the launch of a report which called for the creation of more GM pest and drought resistant crops, Secretary of State for Defra Hilary Benn MP highlighted the importance of science in helping to deal with environmental challenges and the problem of food security.

Benn said: "The challenge is this: we need to find ways of producing more food, for more people, using less energy, less fertiliser, less pesticide, producing fewer greenhouse gas emissions, with limited land and limited water. I believe that we have the knowledge and the technology to do this."

This came just before the Prime Minister Gordon Brown made a speech on the importance of science in society, in which he said that negative media coverage of GM had stunted "legitimate progress" and that power of science should be harnessed to further humanitarian goals.

Meanwhile, the House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee has been conducting an inquiry into food security. In January, Professor Beddington, Chief Scientific Adviser to the UK Government, gave evidence to the Committee and argued that GM regulations in Europe "are not working", and are now so substantial that they have become "a real issue". Explaining how common the use of GM technology is, Beddington noted that suppliers of cotton used GM technology "the whole time" and pointed out that there has never been a single case of health litigation against GM technology.

Finally, the renowned think-tank Chatham House has published a report examining the problem of food security in the 21st Century. The report, which emphasised the important role which agricultural research and development has to play in helping to solve problems of food security, concluded that GM technology "may have an important contribution to make on the resilience and sustainability fronts". It also highlighted that, in regions of the Third World where crops do not reach their full yields because of poor environmental conditions, GM technology has "shown potential to deliver real improvements".

http://www.chathamhouse.org/files/13179_r0109food.pdf



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News about farming and GM in the United Kingdom



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Sir Terry Leahy: Supermarkets too quick to condemn GM

Speaking in a panel debate after delivering the City Food Lecture in January, Sir Terry Leahy (Chief Executive of Tesco) has admitted that UK supermarkets had been too quick to jump on the anti-GM bandwagon. He also indicated that Tesco is willing to re-open the debate in light of scientific evidence supporting biotechnology which has emerged in recent years. Leahy said: "It may have been a failure of us all to stand by the science. There is an opportunity to discuss again these issues and a growing appreciation by people that GM could play a vital role [in feeding the world's growing population in the face of climate change]."

Also speaking at the event was Professor Lord Krebs, former Chairman of the Food Standards Agency, who argued that Europe's reluctance to engage in rational debate had worsened the problem of food security in Africa. He said: "The moral tragedy of the whole GM debacle was the fact that European prissiness about genetic modification has affected its adoption in Africa."

Sense About Science publishes a new report on GMOs

To address the lack of knowledge about what GM is, what it does, whether people are eating it and what would happen if they did, *Sense About Science* recently published a comprehensive guide to the technology.

In the guide, the heads of the independent, public-sector research centres in the UK call for a discussion about GM that helps the public and policy makers to judge what crop technologies could contribute to global food supply and to the management of natural resource and changes in climate. They and other scientists explain what GM is and the research that uses it.

The report can be downloaded at:

<http://www.senseaboutscience.org.uk/index.php/site/project/16/>

According to the FSA's quarterly tracking survey, consumer concerns about GM have fallen to their lowest recorded level.

<http://www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/trackersurvey1208.pdf>



GM can help mitigate the risks of climate change

Agricultural biotechnology has a key role to play in helping Europe reach its ambitious carbon reduction targets and assisting farmers to better adapt to a shifting climate, according to a briefing released last month by the European Association for BioIndustries (EuropaBio).

Europe needs to meet the ever increasing demand for food while mitigating the effects of agriculture on climate change. Agricultural biotechnology can contribute to meeting these goals by reducing the production of greenhouse gases, helping crops adapt to varied and often adverse environments and by helping to increase yields while using fewer hectares of land and other inputs.

Dr Helen Ferrier, the Chief Science and Regulatory Affairs Adviser at the UK's National Farmers' Union said: "The agricultural sector is committed to reducing its greenhouse gas emissions in support of the Government's ambitious targets. However, to achieve this, farmers need access to a range of tools, including new forms of technology, to help them cultivate crops and raise livestock in a more efficient way."

Analysis has shown considerable biotech crop-related carbon dioxide emission savings. Over the period from 1996 to 2005, the cumulative permanent reduction in fuel use was estimated at 4,613 million kg of carbon dioxide (arising from reduced fuel use of 1,679 million litres).

http://www.europabio.org/documents/EuropaBio_GBE_Climate%20change%20and%20biotech.pdf