

GM Observer

News about farming and GM in the United Kingdom

2006 was yet another successful year for GM around the world, with greater numbers of farmers in more countries making GM a commercial reality. In addition, in the UK, Defra's approval of the first GM trial since 2003, represents a major development in research taking place in the UK.

This first 2007 edition of the GM Observer looks at some of the many highlights in the UK from the last twelve months in agricultural biotechnology ...

2006: A good year for GM in the UK

Coexistence consultation launched

The Government launched its long-awaited consultation on coexistence measures for GM and non-GM crops last summer. The consultation, which closed in October, set out both statutory and non-statutory arrangements to achieve required labelling thresholds. abc endorsed the approach put forward by SCIMAC (Supply Chain Initiative on Modified Agricultural Crops), which sets out practical, on-farm guidelines for managing GM crops. We anticipate that the Government's response to the consultation should be published shortly.

More information on coexistence, please go to the SCIMAC website at <http://www.scimac.org.uk/>

GM field trials to become a reality in the UK again

abc member BASF received approval for its application to plant two fields of GM potatoes in England late last year. The potatoes, which have been adapted to resist 'late blight' by using a wild potato gene, have already been trialled in three EU countries, and if successful would be a scientific breakthrough.



2006: GM proved an integral part of the food and feed chain

Maintaining 'non-GM' policies 'unsustainable'

Three leading European agricultural and food experts concluded that delivering and maintaining 'non GM' policies in the EU food and feed sector is likely to become more challenging. Their report, entitled 'The Global GM Market: Implications for the European Food Chain' concluded that the price differential for GM and non-GM products could have significant ramifications for livestock product producers and manufacturers of products such as cooking oil and margarines. The report in full can be found at the following link:

http://www.pgeconomics.co.uk/pdf/Global_GM_Market.pdf

GM animal feed as "wholesome, safe and nutritious" as conventional equivalent

CAST (the Council for Agricultural Science and Technology) concluded that meat, milk and eggs from farm animals fed GM feed are as wholesome, safe and nutritious as similar products from animals fed conventional crops. The report, which was published in August, also examined the regulatory processes involved in the assessment of biotech crops. Its conclusion in this area was that the regulation on GM had proved effective, and that there was no authenticated case of any adverse health-related incidents following a decade of consumption of GM-derived products. Further details can be found at the following link: http://www.cast-science.org/cast/src/cast_top.htm



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2006: A good year for GM around the world

Global uptake of GM continues to increase

The 2006 ISAAA results, published on 18 January 2007, indicated that the rate of take-up of GM crops across the world continued to increase in 2006. Overall, 22 countries - which are home to more than half the world's population - planted 152 million acres of GM crops last year, with the global biotech crop area increasing by nearly 13%. In the EU, Slovakia became the sixth European country to plant biotech crops, while Spain recorded 148,000 acres of GM plantings. Elsewhere, India posted the highest percentage growth worldwide - with plantings increasing by 192% to 6.1 million acres. To put this in perspective, the total UK arable crop area is about 11 million acres.

These latest ISAAA results can be view in full at the ISAAA website: <http://www.isaaa.org/>

UK Government endorses development of GM in Africa

The Government continued to support the use of GM in the developing world to "promote development and reduce poverty" following the publication of the Department for International Development's strategy on the role of agriculture in economic growth. This document commented "biotechnology has the potential to provide significant benefits for poor people if it [is] relevant to their needs and managed safely."

The Department for International Development's strategy on the role of agriculture in economic growth can be viewed in full on the following webpage: <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/pubs/files/growth-poverty-agriculture.pdf>

Consumer perception of GM continues to soften

An independent review on the public perception of GM across Europe concluded that genetic modification seems a relatively insignificant consideration to most consumers in comparison with other factors such as cost and nutrition.

The paper, which was researched by Peter Hutton of BrandEnergy Research, analysed over 40 published studies on the subject published since the late 1990s. It concluded that consumer concerns about GM presence seem to be declining as other food issues, such as salt, fat and sugar content, drive shoppers' food choice decisions.

CASE STUDY: Argentina

A paper published in December 2006 evaluated the economic impacts of ten years' of commercial cultivation of GM crops in Argentina. The paper, authored by Eduardo Trigo and Eugenio Cap, concluded that the process of adopting new GM technologies has had a "deep transforming impact, not limited to Argentina's agricultural sector, but including the economy as a whole." Argentina is now the second largest producer of GM crops after the United States, with over 17 million hectares planted since GM technologies were first introduced in the country. Trigo and Cap have calculated that the economic benefit to Argentina from this dramatic adoption of GM is in excess of \$20 billion, and a strong repositioning of agriculture within both the economy and foreign trade of the country. Further details can be found at the following webpage: http://www.afa.com.au/news/n_news-1930.asp