

Welcome to the GM Observer – the newsletter of the Agricultural Biotechnology Council (abc). 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.



Cassava is the third largest source of carbohydrates for human food in the world and is a primary staple food for much of Africa.

Crop provides day's nutrients in one meal

A GM crop research project funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has developed a highly nutritious strain of cassava sufficient to provide most of a day's nutrients in a single meal.

The Bio Cassava Plus project has developed the genetically modified cassava which contains genes that help the plant accumulate extra iron and zinc from the soil helping it produce vitamins A and E. The project also hopes to develop virus-resistant cassava varieties and aims to delay the rapid post-harvest physiological deterioration of cassava tubers.

The Foundation hopes GM Cassava will help millions of people around the world suffering from malnutrition and ease the food shortages resulting from soaring world food prices.

Further information can be found at the following link:
<http://biocassavaplus.org/>

“Bio Cassava is sufficient to provide most of a day's nutrients in a single meal.”

Peer reviewed study of 'Global Impact of Biotech Crops' published

The peer reviewed study by Graham Brookes, Head of UK-based think-tank PG Economics, has been published online and highlights the significant benefits that GM technology can offer farmers.

The peer reviewed report endorses the study's finding that in the first ten years of commercial use, there have been substantial net economic benefits at the farm level amounting to \$33.8 billion for the eleven-year period of the study. The report also highlights significant environmental benefits. In 2006, reduced fuel use and additional soil carbon storage from reduced ploughing, facilitated by the use of GM crops, was equivalent to removing over six million cars from the road for one year.

The full report can be found at the following link:

<http://www.pgeconomics.co.uk/pdf/isaaa2008commentsPGEconomics.pdf>

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Graham Brookes, PG Economics

EC study endorses benefits of biotechnology

A study by the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC) has found that GM maize has had a positive effect on yields and net farm incomes in Spain.

The study which examined the results of Bt maize production in Spain over three years, from 2002 to 2004, found that yields of the crop were higher than for non-GM maize in the three regions of Spain, Aragon, Catalonia and Castilla-La Mancha, where Bt maize is most widely grown.

Yields in Zaragoza, an area that traditionally suffers from a high incidence of corn borer attacks, saw yield increases of as much as 12 percent.

Bt maize is currently the only GM crop approved for planting in the EU.

The full report can be found at the following link:
<http://ipts.jrc.ec.europa.eu/publications/pub.cfm?id=1580>



Scientists warn of threat to important research

Some of the UK's leading plant scientists have warned that the UK's future ability to conduct research into GM crops is under threat from actions by anti-GM activists.

Professor Howard Atkinson, who was responsible for the recent Leeds University trial of pest resistant potatoes which was destroyed by protestors, argued that the repeat attacks were damaging the UK's ability to conduct research into biotechnology, and this failure would have a disastrous affect on the UK's ability to meet the challenge of climate change and rising world prices.

Professor Atkinson said the UK had fallen badly behind because of the vandalism of protestors.

Parliamentary Committee recognises role of GM in food crisis

An influential Parliamentary Committee has highlighted the nutritional benefits that GM crops can offer to developing countries.

A report by the House of Commons International Development Committee argued whilst the Government must "do all it can" to help fund the World Food Programme budget, soaring food prices had reinvigorated the debate about GM. The report of its inquiry into the World Food Programme and Global Food Security highlighted that supporters of GM such as the USA and Brazil had emphasised that the technology can support yields and could mitigate against "climatic variability".

During the Committee's evidence sessions, International Development Minister Gareth Thomas MP argued that GM crops would not be a "magic bullet" which would solve the issue of rising food prices, but they would have "a contribution to make."

The Committee's conclusion commended the Department for International Development for helping fund initial research into the new technology. The full report and the Minister's comments can be found at the following link:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cms/elect/cmintdev/493/493.pdf>



Professor Howard Atkinson said that the protestors were "zealots" who were not "open to rational scientific debate", whose actions will prevent the opportunities offered by GM from being realised.