



SOUTH ASIA
BIOSAFETY PROGRAM

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NEWSLETTER

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SABP

The South Asia Biosafety Program (SABP) is an international developmental program initiated with support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The program is implemented in India and Bangladesh and aims to work with the local governments to facilitate implementation of transparent, efficient and responsive regulatory frameworks that ensure the safety of new foods and feeds, and protect the environment.

Over the next three years, SABP will work with its in-country partners to:

- Identify and respond to technical training needs for food, feed and environmental safety assessment.
- Develop a sustainable network of trained, authoritative local experts to communicate both the benefits and the concerns associated with new agricultural biotechnologies to farmers and other stakeholder groups.
- Raise the profile of biotechnology and biosafety on the policy agenda within India and address policy issues within the overall context of economic development, international trade, environmental safety and sustainability.

PROF. M.S. SWAMINATHAN CELEBRATES 80TH BIRTHDAY

To celebrate the 80th birthday of Prof. M.S. Swaminathan, father of India's "Green Revolution", the M.S. Swaminathan Research Centre for Research on Sustainable Agriculture organized and sponsored an international conference on Human Centred Sustainable Development Paradigm. It was held at the Chennai Trade Centre.

The four-day conference was attended by prominent personalities representing science, politics, social reform activities, rural areas, academia and a cross-section of people.



Professor Monkombu Samasivan Swaminathan

CONFERENCE REMINDER

FOODS DERIVED FROM GM CROPS: ISSUES FOR CONSUMERS, REGULATORS AND SCIENTISTS

to be held

SEPTEMBER 26 & 27, 2005

at the

**METROPOLITAN HOTEL NIKKO
NEW DELHI, BANGLA SAHIB ROAD,
NEW DELHI**

For more information see Activities at
http://www.agbios.com/sabp_main.php

August 7, 2005, the first day of the conference, was Prof. Swaminathan's birthday and, understandably, events focused on Prof. Swaminathan and his contributions to science and public policy. The following three days focused on the message of Prof. Swaminathan's "Evergreen Revolution," which advocates educating women in developing countries, getting new technology out to rural areas, and incorporating into farming practices scientific advances such as genetically engineered crops and new techniques to conserve water. Program themes included sustainable agriculture, ecotechnology for sustainable livelihood, knowledge empowerment for rural societies and the ecology of peace and hope.

The conference concluded with remarks from Dr. Swaminathan. In part he stated it would be necessary for scientists to work with farmers "through a participatory research and knowledge management system."

During the conference three books were released, one on the life and works of Prof. Swaminathan, the second, a book entitled: "Revolutions: To Green the Environment, To Grow the Human Heart" and the third, a handbook of plantation crops.

South Asia Biosafety Program wishes Prof. Swaminathan a very happy birthday and looks forward to his continuing guidance and support.

NATIONAL WORKSHOP ON MANAGEMENT OF FIELD TRIALS OF GM CROPS

With support from CropLife International and AGBIOS (Canada), the International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications (ISAAA) in collaboration with the Biotech Consortium of India Ltd. (BCIL) hosted the "National Workshop on Management of Field Trials of Genetically Modified Crops" on August 9, 2005, in New Delhi, the first of its kind given in India.

The workshop was conducted in two halves. The first, featuring the roll out of CropLife International's Model Best Practices Guideline for the Management of Confined Field Trial of Genetically Engineered Plants, was a training session, conducted by Dr. Morven McLean of AGBIOS (Canada), that highlighted the educational tools found in the CropLife Guidelines and an outline of the standard operating procedures for the different stages of confined field trials.

The second half of the workshop, which included a panel discussion, presentations and an open discussion forum, provided an opportunity to discuss the existing field trial guidelines for genetically modified crops by GEAC, RCGM and ICAR in India. Dr. T.V. Ramaniah of the Department of Biotechnology at the Ministry of Science and Technology, Dr. K.R. Koundal, National Research Center on Plant Biotechnology, and Sh R.K. Sinha of All India Crop Biotechnology Association made these presentations. The panel discussion included a frank and involved exchange on the current state of field trials in India and related issues under the Indian regulatory system.



National Workshop on Management of Field Trials of GM Crops held on August 9, 2005. From Left: Dr. Uttam Gupta, Resident Director of CropLife India, Dr. C.R. Hazra, Vice-Chancellor, Indira Gandhi Agriculture University (Raipur), Ms Veena Chhotray, Former Chairman, GEAC (standing) and Dr. S.K. Mahajan, Member GEAC.

In his inaugural address, Dr. C.D. Mayee of Agriculture Scientists Recruitment Board (ASRB) suggested radical measures be taken to harmonize the regulatory system and streamline the approval process for GM crops. He also suggested shortening the approval times for new and approved events. Dr. G. Kalloo of ICAR followed this with his assurance of ICAR's full support in conducting field trials

CALENDAR OF EVENTS (INDIA)

Event	Date	Place
Communications Training for Agriculture Extension Personnel	September 20, 2005	Maharashtra
GM Food Safety Conference	September 26 - 27, 2005	New Delhi
Annual conference of the Nutrition Society of India	November 18-19, 2005	Hyderabad

of GM crops and he called for suggestions to improve the existing guidelines for transgenic crop development and an evaluation of the ICAR system.

The workshop was well received, especially by representatives of the public sector research institutions and it proved to be timely because the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC) is currently reviewing its field trial guidelines/protocols in India.

The 140 participants included government officials and representatives from public and private research groups most of whom traveled from outside New Delhi to attend.

SABP-IFPRI CONDUCTS NATION-WIDE CONSULTATION MEETINGS

As part of SABP, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) has initiated a research project entitled "An Economic Analysis of Domestic and International Biosafety and Marketing Regulations for Agricultural Biotechnology in India and Bangladesh". In the first step of this research project, IFPRI is conducting a study of technological responses against biotic and abiotic stresses to assess the impact of alternative research investment on important crops.

As part of this initiative, eight consultation meetings were held across India from July 4 to 15, 2005. The meetings were held in Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, Hyderabad and Kolkatta in collaboration with various national and international research institutions, companies and universities. Over sixty scientists, academics, and policy makers participated in these consultative meetings representing public as well as private sectors. The meetings were interactive in nature and provided an opportunity to discuss various issues related to agricultural productivity, agricultural research, biosafety regulations, and acceptance of agricultural biotechnology. The meetings in India were followed by two similar meetings in Bangladesh.

We would like to thank all the local host institutions and experts who participated in the meetings for their assistance in implementing this core activity of the project.



Experts participating in one of the consultation meetings at the IFPRI office in New Delhi

CALENDAR OF EVENTS (BANGLADESH)

Event	Date	Place
Regional Workshop on the Awareness Building on the Recent Advancement of Agricultural Biotechnology and Biosafety	October 2-3, 2005	Dhaka

TWO WORKSHOPS GIVEN BY ABSP II

Agricultural Biotechnology Support Project II (ABSP II) in collaboration with Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC) organized two workshops on August 10 and 11, 2005, in Dhaka. The first workshop was "Intellectual Property and Technology Transfer" and the second "Socio-Economic Impact Assessment".

On August 10, after a welcome by Dr. M.A. Razzaque, Member Director (Crops), BARC, Mr. M.K. Anwar, Bangladesh Minister for Agriculture, inaugurated the first workshop as Chief Guest. Speeches were made by representatives from the USAID Mission in Bangladesh, BARC, and ABSPII.

In his speech, Mr. Anwar pointed out that the Bangladesh Government is always in favour of introducing new and emerging technologies especially agricultural biotechnology. He emphasized, however, that production gaps should be minimized using all available technologies. He suggested that local scientists take this into consideration in their work.

During the technical sessions papers were presented on "Plant Variety Protection and Plant Variety Registration – Global Relevance", "Plant Variety Protection and Plant Variety Registration – Status in Bangladesh", and "TRIPS Compliances for Intellectual Property Rights – getting geared for the new regime of discussion". The afternoon session included the presentation of papers on "Status of seed industry, new product development and new seed registration – Bangladesh Perspective", "Capacity building needs for emerging IP system in Bangladesh" and "Licensing technologies – developing institutional policy and procedures".

The second workshop, held August 11, was inaugurated by the Chief Guest, Mr. K.A. Kashem, Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture, Government of Bangladesh, and chaired in the inaugural session by Dr. N. Alam, Executive Chairman, BARC.

During the technical session Mr. K. Vijayaraghavan and Dr. F. Shotkoski spoke about the ABSPII support for biotechnology development and the need for socio-impact assessment studies. Papers were presented on "Approaches to evaluating impact of biotechnology – economic and environmental benefits and costs", "Strategies for communication of socio-economic benefits" and "Discussions relating to evaluating the impact of biotechnology – Bangladesh Perspective".

There was also a presentation on the "Impact Assessment (*Ex ante*) on the focused products – approach and initial findings from Bangladesh, India, Indonesia and the Philippines" and a joint presentation on the impact assessment of Bangladesh, India, Indonesia and the Philippines respectively.

A total of 76 elected participants, including scientists, policy makers, representatives from the private sector including NGOs and different international donor agencies, attended the workshops.

U.S. EMBASSY HOSTS CONFERENCE

On August 24, 2005, the U.S. Embassy in Bangladesh in collaboration with Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council

(BARC) hosted a conference on "Biotechnology in Agriculture: Myths & Realities."

The first session was inaugurated by Mr. M.K. Anwar, Bangladesh Minister for Agriculture. Also in attendance were the Bangladesh Minister for Environment and Forests, Mr. T. Islam, and the Minister for Science, Information and Communication Technology, Dr. A.M. Khan. The session featured keynote remarks on recent advances in agricultural biotechnology by Mr. C. Russell of USDA, New Delhi, and a speech requesting continued support by the U.S. Government and other donor agencies was given by Dr. N. Alam, Executive Chairman, BARC.



Inaugural Ceremony of the conference on "Biotechnology in Agriculture: Myths & Realities" held on August 24, 2005. From left: Dr. M.N. Alam, Mr. T. Islam, Mr. M.K. Anwar, Mr. D. Renz, US Embassy, Dr. A.M. Khan, and Mr. C. Russell.

The three Government Ministers expressed their full support for the safe application of agricultural biotechnology in Bangladesh with the aim of increased crop productivity and reduced hunger and poverty. In his speech, Dr. Anwar said the Government of Bangladesh continues to support agricultural biotechnology and wants to see the benefits. Mr. Islam advised that his Ministry has approved the Biosafety Guidelines of Bangladesh and has passed them on to the Task Force headed by the Prime Minister for approval. Mr. Kahn announced that his Ministry has formulated the Biotechnology Policy of Bangladesh but that it had not yet been approved by the Task Force. He advised that the National Institute of Biotechnology has been established under his ministry and will start functioning very soon.

The purpose of the conference was to highlight and correct common areas of misperception about biotechnology and the safety of genetically modified organisms in food and in the environment.

Participants included representatives from consumer groups, agricultural research organizations, the media, policy think tanks, Bangladesh government agencies, academia, industry and the NGO community. Experts from the United States and Bangladesh addressed frequently asked questions about the safety of using biotechnology in agriculture for humans and the environment. Following each lecture, conference participants questioned the experts on any remaining issues of concern.

BIOTECHNOLOGY TIES PAKISTAN, INDIA AND THE US

Ijaz Ahmad Rao on pakissan.com

The promise of Biotechnology forms a strong starting point for tying Pakistan with India and the US. All three countries recognize that, which is evident from their efforts to build closer science ties with each other in a range of fields spanning crops biotechnology to overcome its agriculture issues.

The article will expand on the recent tripartite meeting between the three countries, but let me first summarize the significance of agricultural biotechnology for Pakistan.

See the full article at: <http://www.pakissan.com/english/advisory/biotechnology/biotechnology.ties.pakistan.india.and.the.us.shtml>

SORGHUM TO BE SEQUENCED

National Grain Sorghum Producers - August 24, 2005

There was an announcement at last week's anniversary event that will strongly impact sorghum's future. NSP recently learned that the Department of Energy Joint Genome Institute (JGI) has targeted sorghum for sequencing in 2006. The JGI was instrumental in sequencing the human genome.

According to NSP Research Director Dr. Jeff Dahlberg, the project will engage an international consortium led by Dr. Andrew Paterson from the University of Georgia. Dahlberg said the project is a logical outgrowth of long-term research efforts that have been supported by NSP to enhance the knowledge of the hereditary information of the sorghum plant. In the past, genomics research has been funded by sources including the National Science Foundation Plant Genome Research Program, the United States Department of Agriculture National Research Initiative, and the International Consortium for Sugarcane Biotechnology.

See the full article at: http://agbios.com/sabp_main.php?action=ShowNewsItem&id=6771

FRESH DOUBTS OVER GM COTTON IN INDIA

Bangkok Post - Wednesday, August 24, 2005

New Delhi -- Cotton farmers in India appear to be in a state of confusion. Scores of them in the southern states who adopted the much-touted genetically modified cotton varieties three years ago are seeing pests return to their farms. Companies selling these seeds are being made to pay compensation to farmers for crop losses.

On the other hand, the very same GM seeds have been permitted for use in cotton belts of north India.

And on top of this brouhaha, a government-sponsored research study has found that genetically engineered Bt cotton varieties released in India are not fully effective. In fact, the research finding has provided fresh ammunition to anti-GM lobbies just when they were getting the feeling that they are fighting a losing battle.

See the full article at: http://agbios.com/sabp_main.php?action=ShowNewsItem&id=6772

TOP OF THE CROPS

The Guardian - August 23, 2005

While we in the west are preoccupied with cloning sheep, pigs, dogs and, of course, ourselves, scientists in the developing world are focused on an organism of far greater

importance: rice. According to a Chinese saying, "the most precious things are not jade and pearls but the five grains". Earlier this month the genome of one of those five grains was laid bare when the complete genome sequence of rice was published in the journal Nature.

Rice is the staple food crop for 3 billion people, mostly in Asia. But most of those dependent on the crop still go hungry. About 800 million people don't have enough to eat, many of them children, and about 5 million will die of diseases related to malnutrition. And with the world's population increasing at a rate of about 86 million people a year, things could get a lot worse. It is estimated that rice production will have to increase by about 30% in the next 20 years to keep pace with population growth and economic development. Where is all the food going to come from?

There are two principal ways to boost food production: increasing the amount of land under cultivation or increasing yields. Until the 60s the favoured strategy was putting more land under the plough, resulting in the loss of much of the world's wilderness and native forest.

See the full article at: http://agbios.com/sabp_main.php?action=ShowNewsItem&id=6767

TRANSGENIC GREENHOUSE, RICE MUSEUM INAUGURATED AT HYDERABAD

Press Trust of India - August 21, 2005

A transgenic greenhouse and a rice museum, the two important facilities developed at the Directorate of Rice Research, were inaugurated here today.

The Transgenic Bio-safety facility has been developed as per international standards with specifications provided by the Department of Biotechnology, Government of India, a DRR release said here.

The facility will be exclusively used to test genetically modified rice lines showing resistance to major pests and diseases, it said.

The Rice Museum depicts all information regarding rice culture, science and recent advances in rice research. The information is presented in the form of a panoramic view of rice ecology, interacting kiosk, story telling board, press button board, rotoscope, scrollers, self explaining posters and scaled down models of machinery used in rice cultivation.

See the full article at: http://agbios.com/sabp_main.php?action=ShowNewsItem&id=6763

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