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## **Germany**

### **Biotechnology**

# **Speaking Tour in Germany on "Political Perspectives on the Use of Biotechnology in U.S.**

## **Agriculture"**

### **2001**

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#### **Report Highlights:**

FAS Berlin initiated and worked with State/PD to coordinate a five-city speaking tour the week of November 26, 2000 featuring Carole Brookins, CEO of World Perspectives, Inc., located in Washington, D.C. Ms. Brookins' schedule included engagements in Bonn, Frankfurt, Munich, Berlin and Hamburg. She spoke on "The Political Perspectives on the Use of Biotechnology in U.S. Agriculture" to parliamentarians, government officials, private sector representatives, business persons, professors and students.



**Summary. FAS Berlin initiated and worked with State/PD to coordinate a five-city speaking tour the week of November 26, featuring Carole Brookins, CEO of World Perspectives, Inc., located in Washington, D.C. Ms. Brookins' schedule included engagements in Bonn, Frankfurt, Munich, Berlin and Hamburg. She spoke on "The Political Perspectives on the Use of Biotechnology in U.S. Agriculture" to parliamentarians, government officials, private sector representatives, business persons, professors and students. End Summary.**

Ms. Brookins gave lively presentations, posed provocative questions and elicited animated responses at every stop. Repeatedly, Brookins asked German audiences just how much time is meant when European politicians say it will take longer for consumers to accept biotechnology. Opposition to green or ag biotechnology is characterized, she said, by fear, protectionism and reluctance to accept new technology. The big problem is how biotech is presented in the first place. Terms such as gene "manipulation" and "terminator gene" are laden with negative connotations. Why, Brookins asked, don't groups supportive of green biotechnology wage a PR campaign of their own and change perceptions? One problem is that people are not aware of the current widespread use of biotechnology in other fields, such as medicine. Nor are natural foods necessarily more wholesome and safer, contrary to what most people think.

Brookins drove home the point that crisis drives politics, and politics drives policy. On the one hand, modern technology is responsible for the variety and abundance of our healthy food. Technology drives food production, consumption and regulation. On the other hand, technology in communications has created a global village, where uninformed celebrities may inadvertently influence consumer opinions. The press creates a crisis for the uninformed public. Decisions are made in the fear of the moment. In the market place, perceptions are reality. That is why education and communication are so important. The biotech challenge should involve a covenant of trust between producers and consumers, Brookins said. The United States, in fact, is precaution-oriented. The USDA, EPA and FDA are watchdog agencies, which prefer labeling that is truthful, does not mislead, and which focuses on the end product, not the production process. Germans in attendance commented that consumers do not clearly understand GMO foods, and believe natural foods are somehow safer and more wholesome, but are not willing to pay the added cost.

Ms. Brookins underscored the importance of ag policy by referring to what brought down the former Soviet Union -- wheat silos, not missile silos. Farmer concerns revolve around the weather, money and concentration in the industry. Ms. Brookins believes that the security net for farmers will be increased in the future farm bill. Regarding WTO negotiations, she fears that, with so much financial aid being given to farmers, the U.S. will find it difficult to justify pushing for lower domestic subsidies on the part of the EU. Developing countries will want concessions, and industrial countries are obligated to help them to become better sellers and buyers.

Ms. Brookins fielded numerous questions about the U.S. view regarding the blue box, as well as multifunctionality. The United States is not against multifunctionality, she said, so long as it does not serve as grounds for trade distorting support. Ag policy should not be viewed in terms of price per unit, but in terms of farm revenue streams. There is no one-size-fits-all remedy. Policy should not be based on the least efficient farmer. Ag policy has not failed. It is just that the U.S. government has waited too

long to change ag policy.

Three leading German ag papers covered Ms. Brookins' remarks on the new WTO round, as well as her comments on the new farm bill, and her thoughts on consumer acceptance of GMO foods. Her speaking engagements were a definite plus for post's continuing efforts to encourage an ag policy dialog with our German interlocutors.

**Comment. As for the subject of GMOs, FAS Berlin believes that Ms. Brookins' tour has pretty much completed our efforts to "cover the waterfront" on this issue. Those interested in the U.S. point of view have it. It should now be up to European governments, companies and other biotech friends to get the word out. In the meantime, U.S. agriculture will inevitably continue to sharpen its focus on non-European markets, where farmers and consumers, facing growing demand for food and a shrinking resource base, have far fewer concerns about imagined safety issues. It is in these third-country markets where the growth potential lies. Europeans who at present shrink from biotech seeds and foods can either change their attitudes or, as Mr. Brookins commented, let the world pass them by. Ag biotech is here to stay. End Comment.**