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Poland

Biotechnology

Outcome of U.S. Biotechnology Seminars in Poland 2006

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Report Highlights:

Between March 27-30, 2006, FAS Warsaw organized a series of presentations about biotechnology and co-existence for Polish and Lithuanian audiences which successfully educated participants about these issues.

Includes PSD Changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Unscheduled Report
Warsaw [PL1]
[PL]

Between March 27-30, 2006, FAS Warsaw organized four presentations about biotechnology and co-existence for Polish and Lithuanian audiences. Two U.S. lecturers participated, Martina Newell McLaughlin, Adjunct Professor, Department of Plant Pathology, University of California at Davis and Fred Yoder, a farmer from Ohio.

Surprisingly, Minister of Agriculture Krzysztof Jurgiel opened the first seminar, held at the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, just a few weeks after the Polish government proposed to ban nearly all biotech products. Participants included government decision makers from various ministries, farm organization representatives and representatives of regional governments. A second seminar was held with Lithuania government officials via a videoconference after our speakers' flight to Lithuania was cancelled. A third seminar was held with students and researchers at the Warsaw Agricultural University and an abbreviated presentation was made to the Deputy Secretary of Agriculture during a lunch at the Ambassador's residence.

The following are key observations based on comments/questions from participants:

- Many participants had a poor understanding of U.S. regulations governing biotechnology in particular and food safety in general. For example, many were misinformed about or unaware of the thorough, time consuming regulatory process governing USG approvals for biotech products. Others believed that once a product was approved and therefore "deregulated" there was no government monitoring to ensure safe use and protect public health.
- Many participants expressed surprise that organic producers in the United States, not neighboring farmers, are responsible for ensuring that their production is not contaminated by adventitious presence.
- A few obviously knowledgeable government officials held up the Starlink and Bt10 cases as proof that the U.S. had weak biotechnology safety regulations and enforcement. Our speakers explained that these cases demonstrated that the U.S. regulatory system works.

Assessment: We believe this activity was very useful in that it appeared to clarify many misconceptions among participants about the U.S. biotech regulatory system and provided participants with significant knowledge about and a first-hand account of how co-existence and liability issues are successfully handled in the United States. We support the assessment of one of our speakers that government support for bio-fuel production should help grow acceptance of biotechnology among Polish government officials, farmers and the public. We will continue to educate key influencers in the Polish government, academia and the private sector with the goal of keeping Poland open to the safe use of biotech products.