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Biotechnology

Positive 2006 Results & New Regulatory Framework Improve 2007 Prospects

2007

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Report Highlights:

French corn growers are expected to intensify their production of biotech corn in from 5,200 hectares in 2006 to 30,000-50,000 ha in 2007. This results from the positive technical results they obtained in 2006, with significantly higher yields and lower mycotoxin content than conventional corn. They will also benefit from the recent transposition by France of the EU Directive 2001/18 on biotech authorization and published new coexistence rules.

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Summary

The French Corn Growers Association (AGPM) recently announced positive production results from MON-810 Bt corn grown in 2006 on 5,200 ha. The corn had higher yields with less stalk lodging and higher sanitary quality than its conventional analog. (MON-810 variety is genetically modified to resist damage from corn borer and sesamia infestations)

These encouraging results, as well as the recent French regulation on biotech production and coexistence, are expected to trigger French commercial production of biotech corn in 2007. Expert analysis ranges from 30,000 to 50,000 ha of biotech corn in 2007.

2006 Technical Results

Yields

AGPM monitored 13 biotech corn fields in various regions of France and found that average yields were 9 percent higher than conventional corn yields grown under similar conditions. In regions where the corn borer infestation was highest, the incremental yield provided by the Bt technology rose almost 12 percent.

Sanitary Quality

The sanitary quality of the 2006 biotech corn crop, in terms of mycotoxin content, improved as well: when compared to levels found in conventional corn, the fumosinin content in biotech corn was 45 percent (in the lowest infestation areas) and 58 percent (in the highest infestation areas) lower. Insect infestation provides an avenue for fungal contamination so protection against pests also lowers the potential development of these toxins. This is of great importance given the new EU regulation setting maximum mycotoxin levels due to risks to human health.

2007 Perspectives

Threats

On March 13, the anti-biotech lobby CRII-GEN organized a press conference to present the findings of a Greenpeace funded study which concluded that MON863 was not safe for consumption due to its toxicity on kidneys and liver. The study reinterpreted the toxicological survey conducted by Monsanto on MON863. The French competent authority for biotech approval (Biomolecular Engineering Committee, or "Commission du Génie Biomoléculaire" in French, or CGB) reviewed the same data and approved the product. The CRII-GEN findings received wide press coverage in France.

Regulatory Framework Clarified

Research:

On March 19, the French Ministry of Agriculture authorized 13 biotech open field trials (12 corn products and 1 tobacco) for 2007 and rejected one request for a potato trial. For more information on the dossiers approved, see:

<http://www.ogm.gouv.fr/experimentations/decisions/decisions.htm>

Commercial Production:

On March 20, France transposed EU Directive 2001/18 (EU framework on the release of biotech products for both experimentation and commercialization) into French law through publication in the French Official Journal (Federal Register equivalent).¹

Also on March 20th, the French Ministry of Agriculture (MinAg) created a public register where the number and acreage of biotech plots, by district, will be made publicly available. This list will be available on the inter-ministerial website of the GOF on biotech at:

<http://www.ogm.gouv.fr>. In addition, the MinAg adopted coexistence measures for this crop year which require 50-meter buffer zones for commercial biotech plots (monitored by Governmental authorities), and disclosure by biotech producers to their neighbors of the existence of their biotech crops.

Production Plans

French corn growers welcomed the publication of governmental coexistence measures as standardizing practices that they implemented in 2004 ensuring good practices for coexistence and traceability of biotech and non-biotech corn.

Because of the positive technical results they encountered in 2006, strengthened by the new regulatory framework set by the French Government, and despite the political pressure they are currently facing, French corn growers plan to grow 30,000 to 50,000 hectares of biotech corn.

¹ These are decrees [2007-357](#), [2007-358](#) and [2007-359](#), supplemented by two supplementary documents (called "arrêtés" in French) relative to voluntary dissemination in the environment and the commercialization of biotech products and to information gathering on biotech crops cultivation.