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Report Highlights:

This report provides a brief on the biotechnology situation in Vietnam including the government regulatory system.

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Section I: Biotechnology Trade and Production

In the agricultural sector, there is much interest in growing biotechnology crops including cotton, corn and soybean to increase production. However, Vietnam does not produce any biotech crops, as the Government of Vietnam has not yet authorized their production. A pending regulation would do this (see “The Biological Safety Management Regulation on Genetically Modified Organisms and Their Products” in Section III). The final draft of this regulation was submitted in late 2003, however it is still not ratified. Many government policy makers and scientists expect the regulation to be approved by the end of 2005 or early 2006 as Vietnam needs a legal frame work for biotechnology development.

Although the bio-safety regulation is sill not available, Vietnam does not have any ban on imports of biotechnology products. Indeed, Vietnam imports large quantities of several commodities that have significant biotech content. As domestic cotton production can provide only 10% of the cotton demand in the rapidly growing garment and textile industry, Vietnam annually imports about 100 thousand metric ton (TMT) of cotton from different countries including several using biotech varieties. The United States in particular is a leading cotton supplier to Vietnam and a major user of biotech varieties.

Vietnam's animal feed industry also needs to rely on imports of certain biotech feed materials including soybean meal and corn. Annually, Vietnam imports about one million metric tons of soybean meal for the animal feed industry. According to a major report on the subject, most imported corn and soybean are genetically modified. Since 2002, the Biochemical Analysis and Experiment Center of Ho Chi Minh Agricultural University has surveyed more than 200 samples of corn and soybean meal imported from India, Argentina, China and the United States and they found that at least 30% of the corn from China and 20% of the soybean meal from Argentina were GMOs products. The imported GM corn and soybean meal mainly contained pest and herbicide resistant genes.

Section II: Biotechnology Policy

The Vietnamese Government has issued certain decrees and regulations mentioning biotechnology products. However, as already noted, the comprehensive law on biotechnology safety that establishes a legal framework for biotechnology development is still waiting final approval. This section summarizes these existing and proposed rules.

Vietnam Labeling Regulation

In 1999, Vietnam's Government issued Decree No.178.1999/QD-TTg “Promulgating the Regulation on the Labeling of Goods” (for more details, see VM9029) As indicated in Article 9 of Chapter 2 of this decree, biotech products produced in Vietnam or imported from foreign

countries must be labeled. However, the regulation does not specify at what content level product will be considered biotech products. Neither does it specify at what levels of processing that labeling is required.

Vietnam Ordinance on Food Hygiene and Safety

In 2003, the Government of Vietnam passed the " Ordinance on Food Hygiene and Safety". It became effective since Nov.1, 2003 (for more details, see VM 3014). As indicated in Article 20 of Chapter II: of this ordinance, genetically modified food or genetically modified food materials must be inscribed on their labels with the Vietnamese phrase " thực phẩm chứa gen biến đổi" or "food containing biotech products".

Ordinance on Plant Varieties

On March 24, 2004, the Vietnam President approved the Ordinance on Plant Varieties that went into effect on July 1, 2004 (see VM 4032). Article 6 of the Ordinance Chapter 1, indicates that research into, selection, creation, experimentation, production, trading, use, international exchange of, and other activities related to, genetically modified plant varieties shall comply with Government regulations, but puts no special restrictions on biotech crops.

Vietnam Biological Safety Management Regulation on GMOs Products

In 1999, the government of Vietnam formed a working committee with representatives from the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment (MOSTE); the Ministry of Agricultural and Rural and Development (MARD); the Ministry of Fishery (MOFI) and the Ministry of Health (MOH) to draft a biotechnology safety regulation for biotech plants and their products. The first draft of the biotechnology safety regulation was circulated in 2000 for public comments.

After many debates, discussions and seminars, the latest draft of the regulation was submitted for the Prime Minister's approval in 2003. The latest draft of the Regulation includes six chapters:

- Chapter 1: General Provisions
- Chapter 2: Research and Trail
- Chapter 3: Production and Trading
- Chapter 4: Import/Export and Transportation
- Chapter 5: Government Administration
- Chapter 6: Executive Provisions

And three Annexes:

- Annex 1: Necessary Information on Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) and their Products
- Annex 2: Risk Assessment
- Annex 3: Sample Registration Form for the Research and/or Trail of GMOs

The latest draft of the Bio-Safety Regulation is still on the Vietnam Prime Minister's desk waiting approval. A full translation of the final draft is included in the accompanying report VM5051.

Intellectual Property Right Law

Vietnam is working on the fifth draft of its Intellectual Property Rights law including one section relating to plants that closely follows the convention laid down by the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV). The IP law is expected to be ratified soon, and it should help development of new plant varieties including biotech plant varieties.

Section III: Marketing

In Vietnam, for the time being, there is not an active anti-biotech campaign underway to sway public opinion way from adoption of biotechnology.

Currently, a numbers of Vietnams' research institutes including the Institute of Biotechnology, the Vietnam Agricultural Science Institute, the Agricultural Genetic Institute, and the Institute of Tropical Biology are conducting research on biotech crops. Major crops for experiments are rice, sweet potatoes, papaya, cotton and maize. Vietnamese scientists expect the bio-safety regulation to be approved soon and they will be able to introduce their new crop varieties into production.

However, there are a numbers of challenges for biotechnology development in Vietnam. There is a lack of understanding about bio-safety among scientists and the media. Also there is a shortage of well-trained staffs to develop and implement bio-safety regulatory mechanisms, as well a lack of adequate facilities for analyzing risk.

Section IV: Capacity Building and Outreach

In order to work with Vietnam in biotechnology development, many activities funded by the United States government and private sector have been presented.

- Under USDA funding, an Embassy Science Fellow worked in Vietnam from August 4 to September 26, 2003. The Fellow met with government officers from different ministries and visited many universities and research institutes. He also gave a series of workshops and presentations on biotechnology.
- Since 2000, USDA has annually funded two Vietnam participants to the APEC-Policy Dialog on Biotechnology. Vietnam will be the host of 2006- APEC Biotechnology Policy Dialog.
- Under the sponsorship of the Vietnam Education Fund (VEF), the University of Missouri in coordination with the Vietnamese Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development sponsored two week-long seminars on soybean biotechnology. These were held in Hanoi May 13-19, 2005 and in Can Tho May 23-27, 2005. Two of the seminar speakers were USDA-ARS experts.
- The American Soybean Association (ASA) has funded training on biotechnology in the United States.
- A private American seed company sponsored several Vietnamese farmers participation in a farmer-to-farmer training on biotechnology between Asian countries.
- In the middle of August this year, the U.S. National Center for Food Policy will visit Vietnam and make a series of presentation on biotechnology in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi.

