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Venezuela

Biotechnology

Annual

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Report Highlights:
Interest expressed in biotechnology by farmers and research being done by scientists to improve agricultural output has not translated into a legal framework to govern its adoption and commercialization, as opposition to biotechnology crops by the President has halted any further development on needed regulations. Food production is thus held below potential in a time when demand for same is expanding.

Includes PSD Changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Annual Report
Caracas [VE1]
[VE]

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Despite significant interest in biotechnology by researchers and farmers to meet growing food demand and protect the environment, commercial adoption of this technology is extremely limited and research results lag behind those of other countries. Research is being done, but the lack of initiative on developing implementing regulations hinders real progress. Food output is thus held below potential. A fairly extensive list of international treaties and domestic laws provide the basic legal framework for agricultural biotechnology, but in reality, the regulatory system is imprecise.

Venezuela is a significant importer of basic agricultural commodities. The main products imported are corn, soybean meal, animal fats and vegetable oils. Imports of yellow corn mainly come from the United States, and oilseed products are generally sourced from South American countries like Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Bolivia. While not the major supplier, there are rather significant soybean and soybean meal imports from the United States.

Biotechnology Research, Trade and Production

There are no commercial biotechnology crops under development in Venezuela, and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (BRV) has not granted approval for planting biotechnology crops from any source. There is significant interest by research centers and universities in developing biotechnology. The majority of biotechnology research refers to molecular genetics and tissue culture, as well as diagnostics of animal viral diseases. The research is mainly done by government institutions and universities, with minimal private sector involvement. Venezuela has not exported biotechnology products, and is not a food aid recipient country.

The proposed regulatory framework for the Biodiversity law has been discussed during the past four years, but has not yet been finalized by the BRV. On 2005, President Chavez stated that the country would not allow the use of biotechnology crops. (For a transcript of this speech, please refer to the following web page:

http://www.gobiernoenlinea.gob.ve/docMgr/sharedfiles/Alo_Presidente_216.pdf).

Many anticipated significant changes to the proposed regulatory framework, but to date no changes have occurred. In fact, there has been no further discussion about biotech. While legislation does not prohibit imports of biotechnology crops and/or products, it does not automatically authorize them. Guidelines and procedures to oversee and regulate the introduction and marketing of biotechnology products were established through the Venezuelan Seed Law promulgated in October 2002. Penalties for non-compliance are unclear. Additional information on the biodiversity law can be found on the following web site:

http://www.gobiernoenlinea.gob.ve/docMgr/sharedfiles/reglamentoparcialleydiversidadbiologica.pdf

Biotechnology Policy

Agricultural biotechnology is the responsibility of Venezuela's Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (MARN). MARN's "Dirección de Bioseguridad y Biocomercio" is in charge of administering and regulating genetic resources, biotechnology security, and encouraging

related activities that enhance the use of biodiversity. Among the specific functions of this office are:

- Evaluate all issues related to biotechnology security as well as traditional knowledge associated to biological diversity
- Coordinate activities of the access committee of genetic resources.
- Develop the project "Venezuela's National Framework on Biotech Security"
- Propose a partial regulation to the Biodiversity Law
- Develop the National Bio-Commerce Program
- Negotiate "The National Business Project" based on Biodiversity on the Andean Region
- Issue genetic resource access contracts

Source: http://www.vitalis.net/LDB.htm

The Biodiversity Law created the National Office of Biodiversity (ONDB). The ONDB has oversight authority for any matter related to biotech products.

In addition, a consultative body called the National Biotechnology Commission was created on September 9, 1996, through Decree No. 1475. Government agencies involved in this commission are: Ministry of Development, Ministry of Health and Social Development, Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Science and Technology and the Secretariat of the Presidency. The National Biotechnology Commission reports directly to the President's Cabinet. This commission has the following functions:

- Advise the National Assembly on studies and project laws necessary to develop and transfer biotechnology
- Cooperate with public and private institutions involved in the development of biotechnology and in the development of programs, policies and activities necessary to create, strengthen and use scientific skills and resources.

The Venezuelan constitution calls for the state to be the promoter of new developments (articles 112, 236 and 289). It also mentions that the state is the sole owner of natural resources, including genetics (article 11). The constitution's article 326 talks about the concept of "national security", which would include agricultural biotechnology. For information about these articles, please refer to:

http://www.embavenez-us.org/constitution/intro.htm

Venezuela's proposed legal framework for agricultural biotechnology is based on both international treaties and the national legislation. The National Assembly must ratify international agreements signed by the BRV before they become legal in Venezuela. The following international treaties are legal in Venezuela:

- United Nations Treaty for Biodiversity.
- Cartagena Protocol for Biotechnology Safety (the BRV ratified it on January, 2002).
- Andean Community regulations:
    - Decision Nº 345-Common Provisions on the Protection of the Rights of Breeders of New Plants (http://www.comunidadandina.org/ingles/treaties/dec/d345e.htm)
    - Decision Nº 523- Regional Biodiversity Strategy for the Tropical Andean Countries (http://www.comunidadandina.org/ingles/treaties/dec/D523e.htm)
    - Decision Nº 486- Common Intellectual Property Regime (http://www.comunidadandina.org/ingles/treaties/dec/D486e.htm)
    - Resolution Nº 414

  - Resolution Nº 416
- International Treaty on Phytogenetic Resources (1983)
- International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC)
- The Rotterdam Convention (1998)

New Technologies

Despite the government's reluctance to establish a regulatory framework for biotechnology, different government research institutions have interests on agricultural biotechnology. A few examples are listed below:

- Agricultural Biotechnology Research Center (CIBA) was founded in 1991 by the Agronomic Faculty of the Universidad Central de Venezuela. The Center has the following labs: Tissue Culture, Cytogenetic, Molecular Genetics and microorganisms. CIBA is in charge of research studies based on agricultural biotechnology.

- During June 2008, results from approximately 37 biotechnology research projects were presented within a forum sponsored by the Ministry of Science and Technology (MppCT.) The forum's main topic was food security and in addition, it intended to be catalyst for establishing a national biotechnology web within universities and other research institutions.

- Most recently, the National Institute for Agricultural Research (INIA) opened a Biotechnology Master's Program. The program has been designed with cooperation from Cuba, under the Cuba-Venezuela cooperation agreement. Enrollment started on May 2008, for approximately 20 participants in the areas of plant and animal biotechnology.

- Through the Cuba-Venezuela cooperation agreement, INIA offered a special training course on biotechnology, oriented to journalists and mass media personnel. It was held on June 16, 2008 in the city of Maracay, Venezuela.

- The following institutions, UCV, INIA, IICA, FAO and GIPB are sponsoring an international training course of plant genetic improvement. The course is scheduled for October 2008, in the city of Maracay, Venezuela. Additional information can be found at: http://km.fao.org/gipb/

Marketing

Despite government's reluctance to allow marketing of biotech, Venezuelan producers continue to express their need and acceptance of biotech products. The Federation of Agricultural Producers (FEDEAGRO) forecasts that domestic production could double in the next two years if the regulatory framework for biotech products establishes the free use of biotech seeds. Another strong producer's group, Productores Agricolas Independientes (PAI), presented an article about biotechnology in Venezuela. Basically, it criticized the government for not allowing the use of agricultural biotechnology in detriment of domestic production. For additional information, please see the web site:

(http://www.pai.com.ve/articulos/SíoNoalo.pdf.)

Consumers have not voiced any concerns about biotechnology products or products containing biotechnology raw materials as of this date.

On several occasions, an NGO organization, the Venezuelan Action Network of Alternative Uses of Agritoxics (RAPAL-VE) has publicly urged the President to halt the free use of transgenic crops, based on the country's goal of becoming a "natural country" and on the application of the precautionary principle. In 2002, this organization conducted a study to determine the presence of GMO's in food products sold in Venezuela. Lab analyses were done by *Genetic-ID* lab (based on Germany) and with funds from *Global Greengrant Funds* (GGF). There are no published results available.

Capacity Building and Outreach

There are no U.S. government funded capacity building or outreach activities conducted in Venezuela that relate to agricultural biotechnology. In 2005, the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) allocated funds to increase public awareness of agricultural biotech and have a consensus among the public and private sector regarding the national biotechnology framework. Funding was managed through Venezuela's Ministry of Environment. For additional information, please refer to:

http://www.minamb.gob.ve/files/Conservacion-bioseguridad/MNB.pdf

Annex I- Principal members of the National Biosecurity Commission

Ministerio del Poder Popular para el Ambiente
Dr. César Molina
Secretario Técnico
Luis Alexander Diaz

Ministerio del Poder Popular para la Agricultura y Tierras
Francisco Torrin Bueno

Asociación Venezolana de Semillas- AVESEM
Pedro Pablo Omaña

Annex II- Other Contacts

Servicio Nacional de Semillas-**SENASEM**
http://www.senasem.gob.ve

Confederación de Asociaciones de Productores Agropecuarios-**FEDEAGRO**
http://www.fedeagro.org

Asociación de Productores Agrícolas Independientes- **PAI**
http://pai.com.ve

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