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Weekly Highlights & Hot Bites, #11

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Report Highlights:

Bird Flu strikes Madhya Pradesh, *Government reorganizes the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC)*, *Agriculture Minister on US-India Knowledge Initiative on Agriculture*, *ICAR alert*, *India and Pakistan to jointly register basmati rice*.

Includes PSD Changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Unscheduled Report
New Delhi [IN1]
[IN]

Welcome to Hot Bites from India, a weekly summary of issues of interest to the U. S. agricultural community. The report includes information that has been garnered during travel within India, reported in the local media, or offered by host country officials and agricultural analysts. Press articles are included in this report. Significant issues will be expanded upon in subsequent reports from this office.

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BIRD FLU STRIKES MADHYA PRADESH

After Maharashtra and Gujarat, bird flu has now struck the state of Madhya Pradesh. Results from the government laboratory in Bhopal confirmed the H5N1 strain in two samples from a village that is adjacent to the Jalgaon district in Maharashtra, where the second outbreak was reported earlier this month. The State government has initiated culling of the birds in the 10 km radius of the village, but estimates that only about 7000 birds will be culled. Poultry owners will receive a compensation of rs. 40 for broilers, rs. 30 for layers, and rs. 10 for chicks. (Source: Indian Express, 03/29/06)

GOVERNMENT REORGANIZES THE GENETIC ENGINEERING APPROVAL COMMITTEE (GEAC)

The Ministry of Environment and Forest, reorganized the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC) on March 24, 2006. The new GEAC includes experts from various agricultural disciplines, such as crop biotech, food, quarantine, environment, IPR, economics, drug development, and Government officials. Industry sources believe that the committee is now more balanced in its constitution, and judge the head of the committee to be very efficient, forthright, and objective in decision making. (Source: An Official Contact)

Post Comment: Office contacts have indicated to post that, since a number of members in the committee are involved in biotech projects, they expect the committee to expedite approvals of agricultural biotechnology products.

AGRICULTURE MINISTER ON US-INDIA KNOWLEDGE INITIATIVE ON AGRICULTURE

Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar said the India-US Knowledge Initiative on Agriculture (KIA) will help increase farm production and productivity. For implementation of these initiatives "we would require a change in our research and research management paradigms." He said the KIA has a focus on biotechnology. He added that another area of KIA focus is food processing, and that it is necessary that all products meet the food safety, quality, sanitary, and phytosanitary norms as specified by the Codex Alimentarius Commission. Regarding the revamping of the agricultural education and research system, he said "We have to become more transparent, delegate full authority and responsibility with accountability, and provide a mechanism to scientists to encourage free national and international partnerships, while protecting intellectual property and providing a relatively bureaucracy-free research environment." He also called for overhauling the agricultural education system to encourage entrepreneurship and professionalism. (Source: Financial Express, 03/15/06)

ICAR ALERT

"Subsistence agriculture is giving way to commercial agriculture. Wake up or become a thing of the past," Dr. Mangla Rai, Secretary General of India Council of Agriculture (ICAR), exhorted ICAR scientists at a conference. The new mantra is part of the greater reform

agenda outlined by the R.A. Mashelkar Committee report, which suggested a large-scale restructuring of ICAR. The mission given to ICAR labs was to bring about a 'Second Green Revolution', where by 2020 some 300 million tons of foodgrains could be produced to feed over 1.3 billion Indians. The Additional Secretary in the Department of Agricultural Research and Education said the "patent, protect, or perish" culture must become a second nature at ICAR. (Source: Indian Express, 03/26/06)

Post Comment: The R.A. Mashelkar Committee report on reorganizing ICAR is available at: www.icar.org.in/reports/report-mashelkar.pdf

INDIA AND PAKISTAN TO JOINTLY REGISTER BASMATI RICE

India and Pakistan have decided to set up working group to discuss issues relating to the joint registration of basmati rice as a Geographical Indicator. This is a significant move, as Pakistan had been aiming to register basmati as its own in the past. (Source: Economic Times, 03/30/06)

RECENT REPORTS SUBMITTED BY FAS/NEW DELHI

REPORT #	SUBJECT	DATE SUBMITTED
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IN6025	Weekly Highlights & Hot Bites #10	03/24/06

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