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Venezuela

AGRICULTURAL BIOTECHNOLOGY

Annual

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Report Highlights:
Post provides information on domestic biotechnology research programs and the general environment for this technology. 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. Domestic food production is thus held below potential.

Summary

Despite significant interest in biotechnology by researchers and farmers to meet growing food demand and protect the environment, there is no commercial adoption. Research is being done, but the lack of implementing regulations hinders real progress. 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 in country.

Venezuela is a significant importer of basic agricultural commodities, including 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. However, there have been rather significant soybean and soybean meal imports from the United States in the last year.

Biotechnology Trade and Production

There are no commercial biotechnology crops under development in Venezuela, and the Government 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 does not exporte biotechnology products.

The proposed regulatory framework for the Biodiversity law has been discussed during the past four years, but has not yet been finalized. 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. 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 Projects (BID FONACIT II)

At present, 36 biotech projects are financed within the framework of the BID FONACIT Program. The projects are for strengthening new biotech networks, fostering biotech investigation/development, providing assistance for biotech education of new human talent, and transfering biotech technology. Following are the current biotech projects financed by the BID FONACIT II Program:

- Biotech process for the Shrimp/Prawn Industry
- Biotechnology for commodities: rice, corn and black bean
- Transfer of Biotechnology: potatoes (Ipomoea batata, L) for animal food (Poultry and hogs)
- Biotechnology for aquaculture: Colosoma macropomus, Oxidora níger, Hoplosternum