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Successful Advanced Technology Seminars

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Report Highlights:

On September 19 and 20, 2013 FAS Sofia hosted two seminars on global grain and oilseeds markets and advanced crop technology under USDA Emerging Markets Program (EMP). The success of the seminars exceeded initial expectations. It demonstrated that if the topic of up-to-date information about global markets/trade, competitiveness and related advanced technologies, is addressed professionally with a vision and a plan, and with a good understanding of local specifics, the public discussion on these topics can enjoy high interest among industry and policy makers equally.

General Information:

FAS Sofia Success with EMP Advanced Technology Seminars

On September 19 and 20, 2013 FAS Sofia hosted two seminars on global grain and oilseeds markets and advanced crop technology under USDA Emerging Markets Program (EMP).

The success of the seminars exceeded initial expectations. It demonstrated that if the topic of up-to-date information about global markets/trade, competitiveness and related advanced technologies, is addressed professionally with a vision and a plan, and with a good understanding of local specifics, the public discussion on these topics can enjoy high interest among industry and policy makers equally.

The seminars were organized in collaboration with two local partners: the Association of Agricultural Producers in Bulgaria (AAPB) and the Union of Feed Manufacturers in Bulgaria (UFMB).

Advanced Crop Technology Seminar for Farmers

To implement the EMP project, FAS Sofia worked with U.S. Soybean Export Council and hosted a speaker from the UK, Mr. Paul Temple. Mr. Temple is a third generation farmer, a farm leader, and has held various high level public positions in Brussels.

FAS Sofia worked with the Association of Agricultural Producers in Bulgaria (AAPB) to cooperate as a partner in organizing the seminar. AAPB is one of the two major farm groups in Bulgaria. The association unites farmers from various sectors: grains, livestock, dairy, and horticulture. The AAPB tries to take a neutral position on advanced technologies and often speaks up about biotech as one of the new modern technologies which Europe needs to consider when various policies are debated. AAPB with over 3,000 members, mainly medium-larger size farmers, is known for its pro-reform and pro-market orientation. It works on various training projects aimed at technology transfer; promotes investment in modern and efficient farming. AAPB is not a member of Copa Cogeca but is active with this organization as well as with a number of other EU farm organizations.

The seminar's goal was to present advanced crop technologies in the context of the new Common Agricultural Policy 2014-2020 (CAP) and the new EU and global food challenges. The seminar was held in central Bulgaria (Arbanasi/ Close to Veliko Turnovo) to allow farmers from all over the country to travel to the event. The target audience was 20-25 of the country's most recognized farmers.

In fact, the seminar enjoyed much higher interest with the number of participants exceeded 40, many having traveled 250-300 kilometers to attend. Top leading farmers, and farmers known for their progressive farming methods, as well as ex- Ag Minister (also currently a farmer) and ex-Deputy

Minister attended as well. Many of the farmers were former USDA Cochran Fellowship Program participants.

The speaker communicated the topic in a very understandable and friendly way describing well the role of advanced technologies including biotechnology in the context of the EU CAP reforms and of the challenges EU farmers face. The speaker, a farmer himself in the United Kingdom, provided solid practical guidance in his presentation based on his experience and excellent understanding of the vision about EU and global agricultural policies and issues. The presentation included slides from the 2013 U.S. Farm Progress Show to give special emphasis on diminishing public and private investment in R&D in the EU and its effect on farmers. The presentation also focused attention on issues related to the EU feed/livestock sector which consumes more than 65 percent of EU total grains, and due to its lacks access to products of biotechnology, the grain sector is now showing declining competitiveness against lower cost imports. For Bulgaria where 90 percent of the arable land is under grains and oilseeds cultivation and exports drive production decisions, this message was very strong and convincing.

Farmers asked the speaker many questions making the seminar an open and very straightforward discussion on EU policies, the CAP, and advanced technologies (including biotechnology). Most participants openly expressed their views supportive of the modern innovations. Others expressed concerns that Bulgaria main grain competitors in the Black Sea – Ukraine and Russia- are not declaring their use of biotechnology genetics and thus are at competitive advantage now. A small group stated that no matter the position of farm groups the issue can be addressed only at the highest political levels in Brussels, and not by the member states.

This seminar demonstrated that farmers' support for advanced technologies is growing due to economic and competition issues. A growing skepticism has been emerging in farm circles about the balance of EU CAP and "unfair" treatment of Bulgaria as a member state (lower subsidies, highly restrictive regulations etc.). Five years after EU membership local farmers have realized that the country needs more than EU subsidies for its agricultural sector to grow and be competitive. Slowly but steadily appreciation of modern technology, is becoming more evident to farmers and is earning more consideration as they better understand the economic benefits it offers. This awareness is emerging through farmer-to-farmer discussions in multiple florads.

The AAPB proved to be an excellent partner and event co sponsor for FAS Sofia. It helped with the preparation and outreach to farmers and assisted with the neutral venue. AAPB organized for Agrozone, a popular agricultural magazine present at the seminar, long interviews with the speakers. Following the seminar the AAPB organized a working meeting for the seminar speaker and FAS Sofia staff with the AAPB Chairman and the Board of Directors. The net result of this effective cooperation was a seminar that received very favorable and broad coverage in press.

Advanced Technology Seminar for the Feed Industry and the Livestock/Dairy Sector

FAS Sofia second outreach seminar under the EMP project targeted the feed industry and livestock/dairy sectors. The goal of this seminar was to raise awareness about current challenges and opportunities in front of the EU feed industry and the role of advanced technologies (including but not limited to biotechnology) in the context of global trade trends, EU, and global feed challenges.

FAS Sofia recruited Mr. Jorge de Saja, Director of Spanish Feed Industry Association CESFAC, as the second speaker for the U.S. speaker team and split his participation costs with AAPB. Mr. Saja has significant experience with feed sector and related policies under discussions in Spain and in Brussels. Mr. Saja's experience as a Director of many industry groups in Spain, all in the area of food and feed production and trade, as well as his in-depth knowledge of EU policies and regulations gave him extensive insights and credibility with the audience.

In addition, AAPB covered the transportation costs to bring 17 Bulgarian regulators from the capital Sofia to Veliko Turnovo to participate in the seminar.

FAS Sofia main partner for this seminar was the Union of Feed Manufacturers in Bulgaria (UFMP). The UFMP has about 60 members, all feed mills in the country, most of which are vertically integrated with livestock/dairy operations. In 2012 the UFMP elected new leadership which undertook reforms and stabilized the organization before implementing a new development program. As a result, in April 2013, UFMB became a member of the European Feed Industry Association FEFAC. This seminar, the first cooperation event between FAS Sofia and the UFMB, had critical importance for future development of our relationship with its stakeholders. The focus audience was the top 40 most influential feed mills managers in the organization.

One of the goals of the EMP project was to increase transparency and enhance relations between government and private sector entities. FAS Sofia extended invitations to key regulatory decision makers in the Bulgarian Food Safety Agency. In total 17 regulators, including 5 senior level policy makers, took part in the seminar. The Food Safety Agency expressed strong interest as evidenced by the numbers and the significant effort to participate. The bus departed Sofia very early in the morning (6.00 AM) in order to arrive to the seminar site on time.

While the seminar was geared for 60 attendees, the actual number exceeded 75 participants. In addition to the regulators and leading feed millers, many livestock companies' managers and owners participated as well. The speakers communicated the topic very professionally and in the context of current EU technology and trade regulations and policies. Given their background special emphasis was placed on the global and the EU feed grains and oilseeds trade. The speakers underlined the economic and practical implications of current EU biotechnology policies and the "deadlock" in front of the EU policy makers.

Both speakers were asked many and various questions focused on the EU policies in the area of advanced technologies, feed industry, grain and oilseed trade, farm policies and new R&D. A rather heated debate occurred on the role of oil meals and protein meals in general.

Bulgaria is a significant producer and a net exporter of sunflower seed, meals, and oils in the EU but a net importer of soy products. This often causes debates about which policies the country and the local feed industry should support. Some feed industry representatives think that if Bulgaria supports anti-biotech policies, this will open more market opportunities for local sunflower seed and products sales in the EU. However, other feed industry experts think that despite the growth in use of other protein sources and the efforts to use non-soy substitutes, the availability level is grossly insufficient to meet total protein demand. In addition, the lack of access to competitive protein sources (biotech soy and soy products) has hurt the EU feed industry seriously and this uncompetitive position is being reflected by EU dairy and livestock industries feed sourcing.

Assoc. Prof. Bojin Bojinov, who is the most highly respected Bulgarian advanced crop technology and biotech researcher, provided very comprehensive remarks on the Bulgarian situation. Prof. Bojinov provided examples of biotech products which have been in use for many years by the local feed and food industries without any knowledge on their origin and nature. As this information proved new to many seminar participants, the revelation justified the need for education for the local feed and farm industries.

Feedback and Media Coverage

Both USDA EMP sponsored advanced crop technology seminars enjoyed high interest among farm and feed industry participants and regulators. FAS Sofia received overwhelmingly positive feedback and comments about the speakers and the seminars. In addition, the office was given recommendations to have more such trainings on innovations and new technologies from the practical standpoint. Due to country's current dire economic situation, seminar emphases on economic and competition issues related to advanced technologies made strong impressions on participants and attracted attention of the broader audience reached through the associations.

Local professional media covered both seminars. Agrozona, an agricultural specialized magazine, included multiple publications on the seminars including but not limited to interviews with the two speakers, articles on the presentations, and editorial commentaries on the market implications elevated through the seminars. Publications can be found on the journal web site as well as in the monthly hard copy magazine for September.

The seminars showed the value of tailoring speaker selection to targeted audiences for messaging. Farmer-to-farmer and trader-to-trader enabled the project to achieve its primary objective in

Bulgaria.



Mr. Jorge de Saja and Mr. Paul Temple, speakers at USDA/FAS Sofia biotech seminars

Farm Biotech Seminar September 19, 2013, Arbanasi/Veliko Turnovo Bulgaria



Left: Prof. Bojinov, former Deputy Minister Boyanova (2010-2013), Mr. Paul Temple, two local farmers, FAS Sofia Ag Specialist Mila Boshnakova



Right: Mr. Paul Temple, FAS Sofia Ag Specialist and Mr. Evgeni Oresakov, leading local farmer (18,000 HA)



Left: FAS Sofia Ag Specialist facilitates Q&A session with the speaker, Mr. Temple
 Right: Farm seminar participants, from front to back- ex-Ag Minister Varbanov (1998-2002) and farmers.

Feed Industry Biotech Seminar, September 20 2013, Veliko Turnovo, Bulgaria



Left: Left: Mrs. Hristineta Stancheva, Chairwoman of the Bulgarian Union of Feed Manufacturers (in the middle), with the two speakers
 Right: Dr. Bojinov makes remarks following the speakers



Left and right: Feed seminar part participants



Left: Mr. Paul Temple makes a presentation at the feed seminar



Right: Mr. Jorge de Saja makes a presentation at the feed seminar



Left and right: Mrs. Hristineta Stancheva, Chairwoman of the Bulgarian Union of Feed Manufacturers and FAS Sofia Ag Specialist opening remarks at the seminar for the feed industry.



FAS Sofia staff with the two speakers and Mrs. Hristineta Stancheva, Chairwoman of the Bulgarian Union of Feed Manufacturers (in the middle).



September edition of Agrozona magazine with the coverage of the USDA EMP seminars



Agrozona interview with Mr. Paul Temple on four pages, titled “The World is in Transition to Bio - Economy”



Agrozona interview with Mr. Jorge De Saja and with Mr. Paul Temple on two pages, titled “Biotechnology – a solution, not a monster”



Agrozona interview with Mr. Jorge De Saja on two pages, titled” We need soya. If we have it – we have market with no limitations”



Agrozona interview with Associate professor Bojin Bojinov – one page, titled “Problem solution requires research”