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Agricultural Biotechnology Annual

Biotechnology

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Report Highlights:

Continued interest expressed by farmers and agricultural scientists to improve agricultural output via biotechnology has not resulted in a legal framework for either testing or commercializing biotech seeds and other products. Most biotech development projects were halted in 2006 and no change in the government's position is expected in the short term.

Section I. Executive Summary:

Despite interest in biotechnology by Venezuelan researchers and farmers to meet growing food demand, there is no commercial adoption, as the lack of implementing regulations hinders real technological progress and trade. A fairly extensive list of international treaties and domestic laws provide a potential basic legal framework for agricultural biotechnology, but the regulatory system is imprecise.

Section II. Author Defined:

Section II. Plant Biotechnology Trade and Production:

There are no commercial biotechnology crops under development in Venezuela, and the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (GBRV) has not granted approval to plant transgenic crops from any source. There is significant interest by research centers and universities in developing biotechnology studies. The majority of biotechnology research is in molecular genetics and tissue culture, as well as diagnostics of animal viral diseases. The research is mainly conducted by

universities, with minimal private sector and government involvement.

Section III. Plant Biotechnology Policy:

Agricultural biotechnology is covered and regulated by Venezuela's Ministry of Environment, *Ministerio del Poder Popular para el Ambiente* (MA). MA'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 the office are:

- Evaluate all issues related to biotechnology security as well as traditional knowledge associated to biological diversity
 - Enter into contracts to provide access to genetic resources.

As noted above, biotechnology work conducted in Venezuela to date, is not associated with gene insertion or modification, as there are no laws that permit it.

Section IV. Plant Biotechnology Marketing Issues:

Despite the government's reluctance to allow marketing or development of biotech, Venezuelan producers continue to express their need for and acceptance of biotech products. The Federation of Agricultural Producers (FEDEAGRO) forecasts that domestic production could double in two years if the regulatory framework for biotech established the free use of biotech seeds. Other producer groups have criticized the government for not allowing the use of agricultural biotechnology to the detriment of domestic production. Consumers have not voiced any significant concerns about biotechnology or products containing biotechnology raw materials. Venezuela imports genetically modified corn and soybeans from various countries using biotech varieties.

Some congressmen from the National Assembly have proposed a new "*Ley de Semillas*" (Seeds Law) to be discussed in the near future. That law would forbid the import, use, commercialization, or distribution of biotech seeds.

Section V. Plant Biotechnology 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 allocated funds to increase public awareness of agricultural biotechnology and have a consensus among the public and private sector regarding the national biotechnology framework.

Section VI. Animal Biotechnology:

There are no animal biotechnology events under development in Venezuela, and the government has not granted approval for animal biotechnology from any source. There is significant interest by research centers and universities in developing biotechnology to improve the quality of cattle and hogs in Venezuela.

The use of animal biotechnology techniques is less developed; use has been restricted almost exclusively to the diagnosis of diseases, mainly viral in nature. To date, the information obtained has been based on vaccine produced abroad, not domestically.

Section VII. :

International Regulations Related To Biological Diversity, Subscribed and Approved By Venezuela

Convention for the Protection of Flora, Fauna and Natural Scenic Beauties of America (October 12th, 1940, Washington D.C., United States).

Convention concerning Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Habitat of Aquatic Birds
(February 2nd, 1971 Ramsar, Iran)

United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), Programa 21. Capítulo 16.
Gestión ecológicamente racional de la
Biotecnología (Río, 1992)

Biodiversity Agreement United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED),
(1993)

Biodiversity Agreement. Plant Variety (Cartagena Agreement), Decision, 21/10/1993, No. 345.
Common Provisions on the Protection of the Rights of Breeders of New Plant Varieties

United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) (El Cairo, 1995)