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# Italy

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# Agricultural News for Italy EU and World January 2012

**Report Categories:**
Agriculture in the News

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**Report Highlights:**
Report contains agricultural news items of interest for Italy, the EU and the world for the month of January 2012.

## General Information:

### Public Funds Used to Finance Fraudulent "Made in Italy"

A report submitted to the Italian Parliament indicates that public funds are being used to promote fraudulent "Made in Italy" food products. Specifically, the report notes that one-half of the so-called "Made in Italy" products sold are not produced in Italy with Italian ingredients. Coldiretti alleges that the fraudulent "Made in Italy" business is worth € 60 billion a year. The report also reveals that an Italian government institute, SIMEST SpA, has been financing a Romanian company to produce fake "Made in Italy" cheese.

### Paolo De Castro Re-Elected Chair EU Agriculture Committee

Paolo De Castro was re-elected as chair of the parliamentary committee for agriculture and rural development for an additional two and a half years. De Castro, recognized as an expert in the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), is widely respected by the EU and international community. He is both a technical trade and policy expert and supports agricultural innovation, including biotech. De Castro was Minister of Agriculture in both D'Alema governments and is a close friend of the current Minister of Agriculture Catania.

## FEATURE ARTICLE

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### The Real GM Food Scandal

GM foods are safe, healthy, and essential if we ever want to achieve decent living standards for the world's growing population. Misplaced moralizing about them is costing millions of lives in poor countries. Seven years ago, Time magazine featured the Swiss biologist Ingo Potrykus on its cover. As the principal creator of genetically modified rice—or "golden rice"—he was hailed as potentially one of humanity's great benefactors. Seven years later, the most optimistic forecast is that it will take another five or six years before golden rice is grown commercially. The promised benefits from other GM crops that should reduce hunger and disease have been equally elusive. GM crops should now be growing in areas where no crops can grow, and plant-based oral vaccines should now be saving millions of deaths.

Public discussion of GM food in Europe reflects a persistent suspicion of GM crops. EU regulations, based on the precautionary principle, provide safeguards against "contamination" of organic farms by GM crops. They require any produce containing more than 0.9 per cent GM content labeled as such, with the clear implication that it needs a health warning. This causes a major conflict over GM soya beans imported from the United States and elsewhere. Some GM crops are taking root in some European countries, but in most, they are in effect banned. The public is led to believe that GM technology is not only unsafe but also harmful to the environment, and that it only serves to profit big agricultural companies.

GM crops are now cultivated in 22 countries on over 100m hectares by over 10m farmers, of whom 9m are resource-poor farmers in developing countries, mainly India and China. The alleged risk to health from GM crops is still the main reason for public disquiet, something nurtured by statements by

environmental NGOs. The fact is that there is no evidence of risk to human health from GM crops. The risk from GM crops is no greater than that from conventionally grown crops that do not have to undergo such testing. Genetic modification in the laboratory is what plant breeding has always done, but more quickly and accurately. In addition, those who oppose genetic modification in agriculture often embrace the technology in medicine, like the GM insulin to treat diabetes. Some opponents of GM crops, who seem to have realized that the argument based on lack of safety has no basis, now focus their opposition on environmental concerns, arguing that GM crops destroy biodiversity.

Worldwide experience of GM crops to date provides strong evidence that they actually benefit the environment. They reduce reliance on agrochemical sprays, save energy, use less fossil fuel in their production, and reduce the emissions of greenhouse gases. By improving yields, they make better use of scarce agricultural land. Given the evidence about the safety of GM crops and their beneficial environmental impact, and given the global success of GM cotton, maize, and soya, why have so few staple GM food crops been licensed for commercial growth? Why are the benefits of golden rice, drought or salt-resistant crops, plant-based vaccines and other GM products with special promise for the developing world so long delayed?

## THE EUROPEAN UNION

### 50-Year Old CAP Facing New Challenges

This year marks the common agricultural policy (CAP) 50th anniversary. While the CAP has always been the subject of heated debates, particularly during budget discussion periods, the past 50 years it has developed significantly becoming one of Europe's most adaptable policies especially during challenging socio-economic times. It has enabled deep modernization, while having to face new challenges. The CAP is a system of European Union agricultural subsidies and programs, for crops and land that may be cultivated with price support mechanisms, including guaranteed minimum prices, import tariffs, and quotas on certain goods from outside the EU. Reforms of the system are currently underway reducing import controls and transferring subsidy to land stewardship rather than specific crop production. However, the EU can no longer afford the luxury to hand out CAP payments. A reformed CAP will now play a key role in supporting growth and job creation, and the EC has proposed doubling of Community funding for research and innovation in the European agro-foods sector. While there may be fewer farmers than before, they still help meet consumers' expectations, with food products that are subject to more controls than anywhere else is in the world. *Agence Europe*

### Disgruntled GMO Firms Pulling Out of EU Market

Monsanto has announced it will scrap plans to sell insect-resistant maize in France, the second move this month by Biotech Company to retreat from the genetically modified foods market in Europe. Monsanto's announcement comes on the heels of Germany's BASF decision to suspend the development of GM crops in Europe and move its plant science arm to the United States. BASF's move is a particular blow for Europe, said Carel du Marchie Sarvaas, director of agricultural biotechnology at EuropaBio. "The BASF decision is not good for Europe because I think it is the reaction of a quintessentially European company to what is a stifling political and regulatory environment." Of note, is that Europe was once the pioneer in biotech. *EurActiv*

**Intelligence and Emotions Influence Acceptability of GMO**

A recent study conducted by the University of Maribor in Slovenia discovered that the acceptability of GMOs could not be applied to all GM organisms/products because each product receives different acceptance. The conclusions of the study showed that GMOs have to be considered on an individual basis, as plants and microorganisms receive higher acceptance rates compared to GM animals and food. Overall, females are more accepting of GMOs than males. The complete study can be viewed at http://www.ejbiotechnology.info/index.php/ejbiotechnology/article/view/v15n1-1/1400

## A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

A recent Joint Research Centre (JRC) study showed that EU farmers, if given the choice, would accept and adopt GMOs. Over half of German farmers and almost half of Czech and UK farmers would like to adopt GM oilseed rape, while a third of Spanish, French, and Hungarian farmers would be keen on adopting GM maize. Economic issues such as higher income or the reduction in weed control costs were found to be the most encouraging reasons for farmers to adopt. The relative high price of GM seeds was on the other hand an important reason to reject the technology.

## FAS Italy Regional REPORTING

IT1201 - Italian Livestock and Products Outlook 2012
HR1201 – Croatia MY 2012/13 Wheat, Corn, and Barley Forecast
HR1202 - EU Accession and Challenges for Croatian Agriculture

Reports are available at http://gain.fas.usda.gov/Pages/Default.aspx

## FAS Italy Regional ACTIVITIES

**Honor Award for Excellence in Reporting**

FAS/Rome Ornella Bettini and Stefano Baldi received the 2011 Annual Excellence in Reporting Award from the USDA Foreign Agricultural Service in recognition for the extraordinary efforts of FAS locally employed staff in the EU to collaborate, communicate, and coordinate the preparation of valuable markets intelligence reports that integrate the impact of EU-wide programs and policies.