

I welcome you this afternoon to this hearing to review the benefits and future developments in agriculture and food biotechnology. I appreciate our witnesses and members of the public being here as well as those who are listening through our website.

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the commercialization of agriculture biotechnology. The dramatic adoption rate of biotechnology crops has changed U.S. and global agriculture. I know of no other modern technological development in agriculture that has had such a profound impact on farm operations and food production as this. I have heard biotechnology described as the single largest influence changing agriculture since the introduction of the cultivator.

In my state of Georgia alone, 94 percent of the upland cotton acres were planted last year with biotech varieties. Nationally, crops enhanced through biotechnology accounted for 76 percent of the cotton acres, 85 percent of the soybean acres and 45 percent of the corn acres. By all accounts, biotech crops have produced real gains for growers by raising incomes and promoting more environmentally friendly farming. According to a 2003 study released by the National Center for Food and Agriculture Policy, U.S. farmers who planted biotech crops earned an additional \$1.9 billion over what they would have earned planting conventional varieties.

Globally, during the nine-year period 1996 to 2004, planted acreage of biotech crops increased more than 47 fold, from 4.2 million acres in 1996 to over 200 million acres in 2004, with an increasing proportion grown by developing countries. The estimated global area of approved biotech crops for 2004 was 200 million acres, up from 167 million acres in 2003.

I appreciate that, despite the strong growth and commercial success of biotech crops, the technology and its application elicit strong opinions from many sides. The American public has accepted agriculture and food biotechnology and has a high level of confidence in government agencies responsible for its oversight. However, we recognize that it is important to institute science-based systems in other countries that do not enjoy the same level of confidence in their government or their regulatory systems.

One of the purposes of this hearing is to review the current regulatory framework governing agriculture biotechnology and to learn about new policies that are being instituted based on the lessons we have learned.

It is important that sound science remains the cornerstone of our efforts when regulating this technology. A strong science and risk-based system that ensures products are safe for the environment and human and animal health must be the underlying premise of U.S. government policy. The U.S. government agencies responsible for oversight of agriculture biotechnology include the Department of Agriculture, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Food and Drug Administration. Sound regulatory oversight of agriculture and food biotechnology ensures public confidence and is essential to present and future acceptance of the technology worldwide.

I believe that protection of our food and feed supply is our highest priority, and I look forward to hearing how our regulations are currently working and what efforts are being made to update

them.

We will also hear about current innovations and future uses. Just as biotechnology is revolutionizing the medical field, its application to agriculture is no less exciting. The past ten years focused on agronomic input traits that improved yields, reduced pesticide costs, and improved soil conservation and water quality. In addition to building on these benefits, the next ten years promise innovations that will allow consumers to derive benefits through healthier foods and new crops that will help alleviate world hunger. We are also already developing industrial products in our crops that promote a cleaner environment through renewable fuels and biodegradable plastics.

No other technology in agriculture is transforming the way our nation farms quite like this. The testimony we hear today will help further explain what is being done to ensure we continue to have confidence in the technology and how future innovations will impact our daily lives.