

Press release:

GM Crops Here to Stay, according to International Expert

In 2004 genetically modified or biotech crops experienced the second highest growth on record in 2004 to reach 81million hectares (200 million acres). According to Dr Clive James, Chairman and Founder of the International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications (ISAAA), the global area for biotech crops grew 20 percent in 2004 — an increase of 13.3 million hectares (32.9 million acres).

By the end of the decade, ISAAA predicts up to 15 million farmers will grow biotech crops on 150 million hectares in up to 30 countries.

Biotech crops are booming in both developed and developing countries – with 18 more countries (up to 35) and 1.25 million more farmers joining the genetical modified agri-revolution than in 2004 over the previous year. Importantly 90% of these new GM farmers were in developing countries, according to a 2005 ISAAA report.

Dr James argues that this boom in popularity of GM crops is a testament to the “economic, environmental, health and social benefits” of bio-agriculture. Dr James is speaking on How Biotechnology Can Improve the World at the AusBiotech Conference in Perth on November 23.

In January the ISAAA reported that approximately 8.25 million farmers in 17 countries planted biotech crops in 2004 — 1.25 million more farmers than planted biotech crops in 18 countries than in the previous year. Notably, 90 percent of these farmers were in developing countries. In fact, for the first time, the absolute growth in biotech crop area was higher in developing countries (7.2 million hectares) than in industrial countries (6.1 million hectares).

“The continued rapid adoption, especially among small, resource-poor farmers, is a testament to the economic, environmental, health and social benefits realized by farmers and society in both industrial and developing countries,” Clive James has said previously.

The number of “biotech mega-countries” (countries growing 50,000 hectares or more biotech crops) increased from 10 to 14 in 2004 with the addition of Paraguay, Mexico, Spain and the Philippines reflecting the participation of a broader group of countries adopting biotech crops.

The number of countries accounting for the majority of the global total of biotech crops grew from five to eight and included the United States (59 percent of the global total)



Argentina (20 percent), Canada (6 percent), Brazil (6 percent), China (5 percent), Paraguay (2 percent), India (1 percent) and South Africa (1 percent). In addition to Mexico, Spain and the Philippines, Uruguay, Australia and Romania complete the mega-country list.

In 2004 in the United States, farmers planted 47.6 million hectares of biotech crops, up 11 percent from 2003 and comprising 59 percent of the global total of biotech crops. Continued growth was a result of significant acreage gains in biotech corn varieties and continued increases in herbicide-tolerant soybeans, with modest growth in biotech cotton as the adoption rate approached 80 percent in 2004.

This continued adoption signals a strong vote of confidence in the benefits of biotech crops from farmers around the world, particularly those in developing countries, argues James who adds that five key developing countries — China, India, Argentina, Brazil and South Africa — will significantly impact the global adoption and acceptance of biotech crops in the future.

“The early promise of biotechnology has been fulfilled,” James said. “Biotech crops are now poised to enter a new era of momentum that will stimulate growth well in to the future.”

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The International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications (ISAAA) is a not-for-profit organization cosponsored by the public and private sector with an international network of centers designed to contribute to the alleviation of hunger and poverty by facilitating transfer of crop biotechnology applications to developing countries and global knowledge-sharing about biotech crops. Clive James, chairman and founder of ISAAA, has lived and worked for the past 25 years in the developing countries of Asia, Latin America and Africa, devoting his efforts to agricultural research and development issues. Lately, his focus is crop biotechnology and global food security. James spent a decade as Deputy Director General at the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT) in Mexico, where he worked with Dr. Norman Borlaug, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate, who is a patron of ISAAA.

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