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BIOTECHNOLOGY: NEW PROSPECTS FOR AGRIBUSINESS

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A definition of biotechnology was given as follows: "the application of scientific and engineering principles to the processing of materials by biological agents to provide goods and services." In biotechnology, then, a range of raw materials are transferred by biological agents usually employing some form of bioreactor to produce proteins and/or other chemicals that are difficult or impossible to produce otherwise, and this has implications for agribusiness. The paper explained that the real purpose of the discussion was to focus on the new developments occurring in biotechnology and to try and identify where the new opportunities for agribusiness could lie, especially as they could relate to a small third world country with little or no traditions for scholarship or intellectual achievement. Many countries both developed and developing but especially the former are laying plans and programmes for harnessing the tools of biotechnology for national development, especially in view of the rapidly growing market for its products. What is also significant is that important sources of raw material for biotechnology could be agricultural residues and by-products.

At present, though, due to the recessionary situation, any initiatives that were being undertaken in the Region will experience a set back. The new biotechnology industry is knowledge intensive and critical skills must be developed to handle this knowledge and its application. And, Ali pointed out that we are not prepared either intellectually or otherwise to cope with the demands of the new industry.

If the region is to get involved in biotechnology there are certain priorities for action which were outlined in the paper and Ali recommended private sector participation in closer university-industry interactions. He emphasized the need for government, industry, the university and the public to be better informed about the developments especially with regard to its effect on the future of the third world.
