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AGRICULTURAL BIOTECHNOLOGY – THE EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE

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Summary

Genetically modified (GM) crops are cultivated on vast areas in USA, but the Europeans want only certified GM-free varieties. In Europe the new crops and foods containing genetically modified ingredients are perceived as having no benefits for the consumer.

In my presentation today I will give a broad overview of factors influencing European consumer attitudes and public policy concerning agricultural biotechnology and world trade.

The fact that Europeans are very emotional about food has historical reasons. However, regarding agricultural biotechnology and genetically engineered food many other factors influence consumer attitudes too. Among these I will talk about the role of farming culture, international politics, multinational companies, environmental organizations and the media.

There are significant differences between USA and Europe both in regulation and public policy concerning agricultural biotechnology. The basis for regulation in USA is "sound science" whereas it in Europe is "the precautionary principle". During the last decade public policy has paved the way for agbiotech in USA but been very restrictive in Europe.

It should also be kept in mind, that when it comes to agricultural biotechnology policy, there are significant variations both between the various European Union member states and between the states and the EU institutions. Europe is a diverse group of countries; peoples with different culture, religion and language and reaching consensus on EU level is sometimes very difficult.

The future prospects of agricultural biotechnology and trade in Europe do not look very bright in the short term, but there are already signs that, in the long term, things will change.