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Agricultural Biotechnology Annual

Biotechnology

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Report Highlights:

Continued interest expressed by farmers and agricultural scientists to improve agricultural output via biotechnology has not resulted in a legal framework for either testing or commercializing biotech seeds and other products. Most biotech development projects were halted in 2006 and no change in the situation is expected in the short term.

Section I. Executive Summary:

Despite interest in biotechnology by Venezuelan researchers and farmers to meet growing food demand and protect the environment, there is no commercial adoption, as the lack of implementing regulations hinders real technological progress and trade. A fairly extensive list of international treaties and domestic laws provide a potential basic legal framework for agricultural biotechnology, but the regulatory system is imprecise.

Section II. Plant Biotechnology Trade and Production:

There are no commercial biotechnology crops under development in Venezuela, and the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (GBRV) has not approved any biotech crops for planting from any source. There is significant interest from research centers and universities to develop biotech agricultural varieties, but government restrictions make it prohibitive. The majority of biotechnology research at this time is in fact molecular genetics and tissue culture, as well as

diagnostics of animal viral diseases. The research is mainly done by government institutions and public universities, with minimal private sector involvement.

Section III. Plant Biotechnology Policy:

Agricultural biotechnology is covered and regulated by Venezuela's Ministry of Environment, *Ministerio del Poder Popular para el Ambiente* (MA). MA's "Biosecurity and Biocommerce Directorate" is in charge of administering and regulating genetic resources, developing biotechnology security, and encouraging related activities that enhance the use of biodiversity. Among the specific functions of the office are:

- Evaluate all issues related to biotechnology security as well as traditional knowledge associated to biological diversity
- Coordinate activities of the access committee of genetic resources.
- Issue genetic resource access contracts

As noted above, work done in Venezuela to date is not specifically gene insertion or modifications, as there are no laws that permit it.

Section IV. Plant Biotechnology Marketing Issues:

Despite the government's reluctance to allow marketing or development of biotech, Venezuelan producers continue to express their need for and acceptance of biotech products. The Federation of Agricultural Producers (FEDEAGRO) forecasts that domestic production could double in two years if the regulatory framework for biotech would establish the free use of biotech seeds. Other producer groups have criticized the government for not allowing the use of agricultural biotechnology to the detriment of domestic production. Consumers have not voiced any significant concerns about biotechnology or products containing biotechnology raw materials.

Some congressmen from the National Assembly have proposed a new Seeds Law to be discussed in the near future. That law would forbid the import, use, commercialization, or distribution of biotech seeds. Terms and details of the law are not fully known, but the premise of the law is to protect consumers from potential health problems and to protect farmers from foreign seed manufacturers that will manipulate the market and make excessive profit.

Section V. Plant Biotechnology Capacity Building and Outreach:

There are no U.S. government funded capacity building or outreach activities conducted in Venezuela that relate to agricultural biotechnology. In 2005, the United Nations Environmental Program allocated funds to increase public awareness of agricultural biotech and have a consensus among the public and private sector regarding the national biotechnology framework.

Section VI. Animal Biotechnology:

There are no animal biotechnology events under development in Venezuela, and the government has not granted approval for animal biotechnology from any source. The use of animal biotechnology techniques is less developed; use has been restricted almost exclusively to the diagnosis of diseases, mainly viral in nature. To date, the information obtained has been based on vaccine produced abroad, not domestically.

Section VII. Author Defined:

International Regulations Related To Biological Diversity, Subscribed and Approved By Venezuela

Convention for the Protection of Flora, Fauna and Natural Scenic Beauties of America (October 12th, 1940, Washington D.C., United States).

Convention concerning Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Habitat of Aquatic Birds (February 2nd, 1971 Ramsar, Iran)

United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), Programa 21. Capítulo 16. Gestión ecológicamente racional de la Biotecnología (Río, 1992)

Biodiversity Agreement United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), (1993)

Biodiversity Agreement. Plant Variety (Cartagena Agreement), Decision, 21/10/1993, No. 345. Common Provisions on the Protection of the Rights of Breeders of New Plant Varieties

United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) (El Cairo, 1995).