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Agricultural Biotechnology seminar carried out in Romania

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Report Highlights:

In June 2014, FAS Bucharest and AgroBiotechRom Association, the voice of the biotech industry in Romania, organized another successful biotech outreach activity. The rapid expansion of biotech crops worldwide, the asynchronous authorization of biotech events at EU level and its consequences on the feed and livestock sectors, along with the shift of the biotech cultivation decision from the European Union to Member States were just a few of the topics discussed during the seminar. This report provides a description of the program carried out in Romania.

General Information:

1. **Activity name:** Biotechnology Outreach, Romania
2. **Beginning/Ending Dates:** June 19, 2014
3. **City/Country:** Bucharest – Romania
4. **Purpose of the activity:**

In June 2014, FAS Bucharest partnered with AgroBiotechRom Association for organizing a seminar dedicated to the role of biotechnology in the Romanian and European feed market. The purpose of the activity was to consolidate past efforts for raising the public awareness on the safety of biotech products and the importance of a science-based and transparent approach in regulating biotechnology within the EU framework. In line with this objective, the activity was meant to provide factual information to decision makers, researchers and producers on the benefits of the technology and societal costs of non-science-based decisions.

Alexander Döring, the General Secretary of the European Food Manufacturers Federation (FEFAC) was invited to talk about the “*EU Feed industry experiences and future challenges with regard to the EU Biotech policy framework*”. Beat Späth, EuropaBio Director of Agricultural Biotechnology, spoke about the EU policies related to agricultural biotechnology in a presentation called “*Science, not fiction: EU policies on biotechnology*”.

Local Government officials, members of the Romanian Parliament, professors from the Agricultural Universities, research institutes, livestock producers, feed-compound manufacturers, crop farmers, grains traders, and media were invited to attend the seminar.

5. Activity description

FAS Bucharest and AgroBiotechRom organized on June 19, 2014 a seminar called *Agriculture and Modern Biotechnology in Romania and Europe*, dedicated to the role of biotechnology in the European food and feed markets.

The organizers successfully managed to secure for this activity the participation of two excellent speakers: Alexander Döring, the General Secretary of the European Food Manufacturers Federation (FEFAC), the voice of the European feed industry, and Beat Späth, Director for Agricultural Biotechnology in EuropaBio, the European Association for Bioindustries. The Agricultural University in Bucharest was represented by Prof. Toma Dinu, Dean of the Faculty of Agricultural Management and Rural Development in Bucharest, who delivered in front of the audience an analysis of the Romanian agricultural trade during the past ten years. The rector of the University of Agricultural Science and Veterinary Medicine Cluj-Napoca, Prof. Doru Pamfil, brought a valuable contribution to the debate from the role of the moderator played in the second session of the seminar. The first session was moderated by Vlad Macovei, Director of *Agrointeligenta* agricultural publication.

The event was opened by the U.S. Embassy Regional Agricultural Attaché, Michael Henney, the Ambassador of the Argentine Republic, Claudio Perez Paladino, and Nicolae Hristea, Executive Director for AgroBiotechRom.

In the beginning, Beat Späth, EuropaBio's representative, reviewed the status of the biotechnology adoption in the world and at EU level. The regulatory framework was described in detail along with the lack of speed in the authorization process. According to the speaker, in June 2014 there were 50 authorized biotech events, 69 biotech dossiers with pending approval and 50 dossiers pending the EFSA scientific opinion.

Given the date of the seminar, several days after European Union made another step in the process of shifting the biotech cultivation decision making over to Member States ("nationalization proposal"), this topic was addressed by the speaker as well. In the view of EuropaBio organization the development showed the lack of willingness of the EU institutions and Member States to correctly implement the current regulatory framework for GMO approvals they had decided upon themselves and the fact that renationalizing a common EU policy, based on non-objective grounds, was a negative precedent and contrary to the spirit of the single market.

Alexander Döring, FEFAC representative, spoke about the animal nutrition trends in the European Union, the importance of high-quality feed ingredients as well as the asynchronous authorization process at EU level. The comprehensive description of the industrial compound feed production in the European Union per species, continued with the feed material consumption emphasizing that imported feed materials reach 43 million MT, of which oil meals 23.8 MMT, feed cereals 12.5 MMT, DDGS and corn gluten feed 0.9 MMT, followed by molasses, fish meal, pulses etc. According to FEFAC, the degree of self-sufficiency in terms of protein-rich feed materials in the European Union was in 2011 only 32 percent and as low as 3 percent of soybeans and soy-derived products.

The EU regulatory framework was another topic addressed by the FEFAC speaker, highlighting the increasing use of biotechnology, which in the context of divergent regulatory approaches to managing genetically engineered crops, severely complicates the trade of agricultural commodities. The delays generated by the asynchronous authorization process in the EU negatively affect the EU feed and livestock sector.

Each presentation was followed by a Q&A session, where invitees were able to address questions to speakers or add comments. Some participants criticized the tendency of the Romanian and EU bodies to ignore science and base their decisions on the information furnished by the "greens", with dramatic effects on the development of Romanian agriculture and food industry. Some participants commented that the current EU policy leads to the deterioration of the Romanian and European industries competitiveness, in general.



Michael Henney, Regional Agricultural Attache (center), Claudio Perez Paladino, Ambassador of Argentina (left) and Nicolae Hristea, Director AgroBiotechRom (right) opening the Biotechnology Seminar



Beat Späth, Director Agrobiotechnology, EuropaBio



Alexander Döring, Secretary General, FEAC



Toma Dinu, Dean, Faculty of Agricultural Management and Rural Development in Bucharest



Overview on the participants

This type of outreach was designed to increase the level of knowledge of the main stakeholders regarding the challenges produced by the EU policy at the level of feed manufacturers and livestock producers. It also intended to warn farmers and processors about the potential consequences of the “nationalization of the cultivation decision” on the farmers’ access to modern technology.

In terms of number of event attendees, about 70 participants attended the seminar consisting of Romanian Government officials, researchers, academics, farmers, livestock producers, grains traders, feed-compound manufacturers, and media.

The biotech seminar was attended by most relevant agricultural specialized agricultural media. Printed specialized press coverage of the seminar was impressive for such a specialized event. The event generated dozens of articles (please see list at the end of the report). FAS Regional Agricultural Attaché Michael Henney was interviewed by the largest financial daily in Romania “Ziarul Financiar” (10,000 printed issues) and gave a live interview for Radio Romania Antena Satelor, the public radio channel dedicated to rural life (with an audience of 750,000 listeners).

Continuing such outreach events on biotechnology from different angles would consolidated this year’s activity and would likely result in more trade-friendly approaches for cultivation and import of bioengineered plants and products in Romania.

Appendix 1: Selection of printed and on-line articles

<http://www.recolta.eu/politica-agricola/nicolae-hristea-despre-posibila-nationalizare-a-deciziilor-privind-omg-o-lupta-inegala-o-inchizitie-verde-acordul-permite-mai-multa-flexibilitate-si-securitate-juridica-tonio-borg-25523.html>

<http://www.zf.ro/zf-24/americanii-au-controlul-pietei-mondiale-a-cerealelor-cu-informatiile-stranse->

[prin-ambasade-la-bucuresti-statul-nu-publica-nici-macar-prognozele-de-recolta-12796079](#)

<http://www.fabricadecarne.ro/agrobiotechrom-despre-perspectiva-biotehnologiilor-statele-membre-ue>

<http://www.fabricadelapte.ro/agrobiotechrom-domeniul-biotehnologiilor-este-o-lupta-inegala>

<http://agrintel.ro/22687/declaratie-comuna-adoptata-in-cadrul-seminarului-agricultura-si-biotehnologiile-moderne-in-romania-si-europa/>

http://www.diacaf.com/economic/americanii-au-controlul-pietei-mondiale-a-cerealelor-cu-informatiile_9259556.html

<http://www.bizlawyer.ro/mobile/stiri/interviuri-opinii/hristea-agrobiotechrom-productia-bazata-pe-biotehnologie-in-romania-se-ridica-la-aproximativ-5-miliarde-de-euro>

<http://www.agerpres.ro/economie/2014/06/19/stirile-amiezii-economic-19-iunie-13-32-38>

<http://agrintel.ro/22674/nicolae-hristea-agrobiotechrom-despre-perspectiva-biotehnologiilor-in-statele-ue-este-o-lupta-inegala-avem-o-inchizitie-verde-in-care-dicteaza-criteriile-politice/>

<http://www.agrinet.ro/content.jsp?page=1585&language=1>

<http://foto.agerpres.ro/index.php?i=7611126>

<http://agrobiotechrom.ro/?p=kiwdbhzw>

<http://www.aliantasemintelor.ro/index.php/noutati/participarea-aisr-la-evenimente/agricultura-si-biotehnologiile-moderne-in-romania-si-europa>