66th Plenary Meeting of the

INTERNATIONAL COTTON ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MINUTES

SIXTH OPEN SESSION

9:00 hr. Friday October 26, 2007
Mr. Georges Yameogo in the Chair

The CHAIRMAN stated that biotechnology has the potential to provide solutions to many current production problems. However, a decision to adopt biotech cotton depends on production practices and specific production conditions. The issue is interesting but requires extensive debate and that is why we have this session devoted to Biotech Cotton: Situation and Solutions.

Mr. Aydin Kesen of the Izmir Mercantile Exchange, Turkey, made a presentation on the topic 'The Developments in Production and Trade of Biotech Cotton in Turkey and Traceability.' He stated that biotech cotton area is increasing every year. Biotech crops were grown on 102 million hectares, and cotton occupied 13% of the biotech area in 2006. Biotech cotton was 39% of the total cotton area in 2006. The most important factor that directs international trade is consumer preferences. Though existing products are safe and biotech cotton has many advantages in the form of lower cost, higher yields, etc., transgenic products are perceived by some to pose risks to human health, food security biological diversity and to have socio economic impacts. He said that consumers have a right to know the origin of cotton, biotech or non-biotech. Mr. Kesen stated that all cotton grown in Turkey is non-biotech, but local production is enough to meet only half of mill use. Almost 60% of the cotton imported into Turkey comes from the USA and 10% from India. India and the USA planted biotech cotton on over 90% and 50% of area in the current season, so biotech cotton is already used in Turkey. Traceability of cotton in the world is not possible but if some countries like Turkey, Greece, Spain and Egypt do not grow biotech cotton, they should be entitled to label their cotton as 100% GMO free. He suggested that his suggestion be included in the statement of the meeting.

On a question raised by the delegate of ISRAEL, Mr. Kesen replied that testing of biotech cotton is already going on in Turkey under very strict control, and if it is found suitable for some areas, in his opinion, it should be approved for that area. The primary objective is to increase yields.

Dr. Robert Tripp of the Overseas Development Institute, UK, talked about a project funded by

Oxfam and the Rockefeller Foundation on biotech cotton for resource poor farmers being implemented in China (Mainland), Colombia, India and South Africa. The project is based on the theme that yield and income implications of biotech cotton are important, but the degree to which farmers understand the technology and have control over it are real indicators about whether the new technology can reduce poverty. The project is still collecting data in the field, but a review of available literature shows that farmers in India have received increases in yields, but pesticide use has not been reduced. The experience with educated farmers who used lesser pesticides proved that new technologies combined with improved management skills could enhance the usefulness of Bt technology. Dr. Tripp also mentioned many other issues including the nature of farmers' access to information about pest control, variety choices, seed industry and extension services, if not adequately employed and utilized, could risk the long-term sustainability of Bt technology. Illegal Bt seed of unknown purity and origin, encouraged by the high cost of the technology, has affected cotton production systems, particularly in Argentina. Such a chaotic situation is a threat to further development of technological innovations. The technology fee is very low in China (Mainland), which speeded the adoption of Bt technology. The Oxfam/Rockefeller project will not make a judgment on whether biotech cotton is appropriate. Instead, the experiences with biotech cotton will be used to draw lessons about the type of support and direction required if the technology is to be used to best serve resource poor farmers. Project results will be available by the end of 2008.

In response to a question asked by the delegate of SUDAN, Dr. Tripp said that the Oxfam is not studying the pest profiles in each area, and will rely on the information already available locally. He stated that refuge requirements are not imposed in China (Mainland) and they are variably implemented in other countries.

The delegate of UGANDA stated that her government is in serious negotiations with Delta and Pine Land Company, and she asked if Dr. Tripp could give some idea about the cost of technology in various countries and whether the Oxfam/Rockefeller project is dealing with individual growers or groups of growers. The delegate supported the proposal from Turkey regarding labeling of non-biotech cotton. Dr. Tripp replied that the project would study the technology fee to growers in various countries. The project has approached growers individually and also through cooperatives, depending upon the situation in each project country.

Dr. Tripp replied to a question from the delegate of KENYA and said that secondary insects are an issue when Bt varieties are used, and there is also a fear over the development of resistance in

target pests.

In response to a question from the delegate of the USA, the Secretary General said that to his knowledge, there are no prohibitions on labeling cotton as non-GMO. He said the proposal by Mr. Kesen, supported by Uganda, needs further investigation and will be discussed in the Standing Committee.

Mr. Willem Olthof from the European Commission (EC) made a presentation on the topic 'EC Policies Regarding Biotech Cotton.' He stated that a regulatory framework has evolved over time in the EC. General food laws and the European Food Safety Authority were established in 2002, and a 'white paper' was published on regulation of GMOs. Accordingly, the three important documents were Directive 2001/18 on the deliberate release of GMO's into the environment, Regulation (EC) No. 1829/2003 and regulation on traceability and labeling of GMOs. The main elements of these regulations are an integrated approach for food and feed, centralized and transparent approval procedure with a clear time frame, clear rules on traceability and labeling and clarification of elements already on the market. Mr. Olthof described details of each component of the regulations. On the cultivation of GMO crops in European Union (EU) states, Mr. Olthof stated that 51 varieties/products are permitted for cultivation in the EU countries. The total biotech area in the EU in 2006 was 62,200 hectares in seven member states. Currently, 45 applications are in the pipeline out of which seven belong to cotton but for feed/oil use and not for production in the field. One request on cotton is in the final stages of approval. The major biotech crop planted in EU countries is maize, and most new applications are also for GM maize. Mr. Olthof said that the major challenges, in GM crops are consumer acceptance and lack of support from member states of the EU. Mr. Olthof stated that for the furtherance of biotech cotton and development cooperation, EC respects the choice of individual countries, makes sure that GMO and non-GMO cultivation can co-exist in the same environment and would like to see that a proper system is in place before an approval is granted. However, so far the EC has not provided any active support for GMO research. Mr. Olthof informed the meeting that the EC is planning to organize a conference on biotech cotton some time in the first half of the next year in one of the West African countries. The objective of the conference is to provide science-based facts on negative and positive aspects of biotech cotton. The meeting will be conducted within the framework of the EU-Africa Partnership on Cotton.

The CHAIR thanked the presenters for their efforts. Seeing no additional business, the CHAIR adjourned the meeting at 10:35 AM.