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NATIONAL C-FAR

NATIONAL COALITION FOR FOOD & AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH (NCFAR)

Program:

BIOTECH REGS—SMALL BUSINESSES AND UNIVERSITIES

Regulatory Barriers to the Development of Innovative Agricultural Biotechnology by Small Businesses and Universities

March 23, 2018
PROGRAM

Welcome and Introduction

Dr. Elizabeth Stulberg
NCFAR Representative

Distinguished Speaker

Dr. Alan McHughen
CE Biotechnology Specialist and Geneticist
University of California–Riverside

Open Forum

Closing

Dr. Elizabeth Stulberg

NCFAR IS a nonprofit, nonpartisan, consensus-based and customer-led coalition that brings food, agriculture, nutrition, conservation and natural resource stakeholders together with the food and agriculture research and extension community, serving as a forum and a unified voice in support of sustaining and increasing public investment at the national level in food and agricultural research, extension, and education.
ABSTRACT
This report analyses the current U.S. regulatory system for GE crops, compares it with those of major trading partners, and considers various aspects of agricultural biotechnology regulation, including labeling and scientifically sound alternatives to the unnecessarily restrictive current regulatory system to allow the benefits of safe agricultural biotechnology products from small business and universities to accrue to farmers, consumers, and the environment. Since the early 1980s, American taxpayers have invested heavily in public, university, and small business developers of crops and foods improved using biotechnology. Yet the return on this investment, in terms of new, improved genetically engineered (GE) crops, is disappointingly thin. Although the U.S. Department of Agriculture, universities, and small businesses have developed dozens of GE crops—with improved traits ranging from healthier and less allergenic to safer and more environmentally sustainable—and carried many through safety and premarket testing, almost all have been denied commercial release mainly because of U.S. regulatory obstacles that disproportionately penalize public, academic, and smaller private breeding entities. In theory, scientifically sound regulations serve the public good by assuring a reasonable degree of product safety while not unduly stifling innovation. In a scientifically rigorous, risk-based safety assessment, the degree of regulatory scrutiny is commensurate with the degree of identified risk posed by the product in question. In reality, however, our current regulations are not based on product risk, but on spurious, undocumented risks posed by the process of genetic engineering, and they impose scrutiny well beyond that imposed on non-GE products posing similar risk. As well, the unnecessarily onerous and expensive regulations discourage and stifle innovation, especially in small businesses and universities.

SPEAKER BIOGRAPHY
Dr. Alan McHughen is a public sector educator, scientist, and consumer advocate. After earning his doctorate at Oxford University, Dr. McHughen worked at Yale University and the University of Saskatchewan before joining the University of California, Riverside. A molecular geneticist with an interest in crop improvement and environmental sustainability, he helped develop U.S. and Canadian regulations governing the safety of genetically engineered crops and foods. He served on U.S. National Academy of Sciences panels investigating the environmental effects of transgenic plants and the safety of genetically engineered foods, and he helped review a third NAS panel looking at sustainability and economic impacts of biotechnology on U.S. agriculture. Having developed internationally approved commercial crop varieties using both conventional breeding and genetic engineering techniques, he has firsthand experience with the relevant technical, biosafety, and policy issues from both sides of the regulatory process. As an educator and consumer advocate, he helps nonscientists understand the environmental and health impacts of both modern and traditional methods of food production. His award-winning book, Pandora’s Picnic Basket: The Potential and Hazards of Genetically Modified Foods, uses understandable, consumer-friendly language to explode the myths and explore the genuine risks of genetic modification technology. More recently, Dr. McHughen served as a Jefferson Science Fellow at the U.S. Department of State and as a Senior Policy Analyst at the White House.
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