



SOUTH ASIA  
BIOSAFETY PROGRAM

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# NEWSLETTER

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## SABP

The South Asia Biosafety Program (SABP) is an international developmental program initiated with support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The program is implemented in India and Bangladesh and aims to work with the local governments to facilitate implementation of transparent, efficient and responsive regulatory frameworks that ensure the safety of new foods and feeds, and protect the environment.

Over the next three years, SABP will work with its in-country partners to:

- Identify and respond to technical training needs for food, feed and environmental safety assessment.
- Develop a sustainable network of trained, authoritative local experts to communicate both the benefits and the concerns associated with new agricultural biotechnologies to farmers and other stakeholder groups.
- Raise the profile of biotechnology and biosafety on the policy agenda within India and address policy issues within the overall context of economic development, international trade, environmental safety and sustainability.

## ISAAA HOLDS MEDIA WORKSHOP FOR HINDI JOURNALISTS AND REPORTERS

ISAAA in collaboration with the International Crop Research Institute for Semi-Arid Tropic (ICRISAT) and the Indian Agriculture Research Institute (IARI) organized a two-day workshop for the Hindi media on April 13 and 14, 2005 in New Delhi. The workshop focused on the global and local status of modern agricultural biotechnology and its opportunities and challenges.

Approximately forty Hindi writing journalists and agricultural extension officers from New Delhi, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Uttranchal and Chattishgarh – the Northern States of India - participated in the workshop. Joining them in the discussions were a handful of scientists, policy makers and public relations officers from ICAR, IARI, ICRISAT, Ministry of Environment and Forest (MOEF) and Vigyan Parsar (Ministry of S&T). The two-day event generated a lot of interest and discussion among the media participants about the potential role of modern biotechnology in Indian agriculture, in particular that of transgenic (GM) crops like Bt cotton, which is already available to Indian farmers.

Media participants also had the opportunity to listen to various resources speakers, each with their area of expertise. They included Dr. Mangla Rai, DG (ICAR), Dr. Nagarajan, Director (IARI), Dr. C.D. Mayee, Chairman (ASRB), Dr. J.P. Mishra (ADG-IPR, ICAR), Dr. B.S. Parmar, (Deputy Director, IARI), Dr. Manorajan Hota (MOEF), Dr. K.K. Sharma and Dr. Prabhat Kumar (ICRISAT), Dr. K.R. Koundal, Dr. K.C. Bansal, Dr. O.P. Bambawale and Dr. O.P. Govila (IARI), Dr. P. Dwivedi (ITRC), Sh. R.K. Sinha (AICBA), Sh. Changel Reddy (FFA),

Sh. R.D. Sharma and Sh. Pallav Bagla (Journalists) and Sh. Bhagirath Choudhary and Dr. Marga Escaler from ISAAA.

During his inaugural address, Dr. S. Nagarajan said that when the risks and benefits are weighed against each other, transgenic crops offer more benefits than risk. Concurring with this was Dr. C.D. Mayee who stressed that biotechnology has the potential to contribute towards poverty alleviation, rural development and agricultural sustainability while delivering direct benefits to farmers and consumers.

Dr. Mangla Rai, in his special address, assured the journalists of the safety and agronomic advantage of GM technologies particularly in Indian agriculture. He spoke of ICAR's strong support for the research and development of important crops for India and championed the scientific capability of local scientists to develop new generation crops resistant to insects and viruses and tolerant to drought and other environmental stresses. In closing, he called upon the reporters to carry simple and accurate messages to the Indian farming community.

The workshop concluded with media participants commending the organizers for such an activity and expressed their desire to see more of such dialogues between scientists and the media taking place in the future.

For more information please contact:

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ISAAA Workshop for Hindi media, April 13 and 14, 2005.

[Left to Right: Dr. Kiran Sharma (Scientist ICRISAT), Dr. B.S. Parmar (Deputy Director IARI), Dr. Mangla Rai (DG ICAR), Mr. Bhagirath Choudhary (ISAAA) and Dr. J.P. Mishra (ADG-IPR, ICAR)]

## FOOD SAFETY WORKSHOPS

**S**ABP, in association with Biotechnology Consortium India Ltd., hosted two very successful workshops addressing the safety assessment of foods derived from genetically modified (GM) crops in New Delhi and Hyderabad during the week of April 11-15. The workshops, attended by a total of 60 scientists and regulators from India and Bangladesh interested in the technical aspects of GM food safety assessment, introduced participants to the Codex Alimentarius guidelines for GM food safety assessment as well as other internationally accepted guidance and consensus documents, such as those prepared by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the World Health Organization, and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.



Dr. Swapan Datta, presenting on the concepts and principles of GM food safety assessment in New Delhi.

**D**uring the workshops, participants discussed and debated the critical parameters used to evaluate potential risks associated with GM food products through the evaluation of data presented in a case study of an insect protected maize event. The case study is an abridged version of the actual dossiers submitted by the developer to regulatory authorities for novel food safety evaluation in the U.S., the EU, Japan and the Philippines. The case study provided examples of typical data (raw or summarized), its interpretation by the product developer, as well as the regulatory assessment of the information provided. Topics covered included host and donor organisms; molecular characterization; expressed material/effect; toxicity; potential allergenicity; and nutritional data.

**T**he workshops were delivered by Dr. Swapan Datta, former Senior Plant Biotechnologist and HarvestPlus Rice Crop Leader, IRRI; Dr. Florida Cariño, Professor, University of the Philippines and a long-standing member of the National Committee on the Biosafety of the Philippines; and Dr. Morven McLean, President, AGBIOS and former Chief of the Plant Biosafety Office, Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

**I**nterest in the workshops was such that two more will now be held on May 27 and 28 at the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, Chennai and May 30 and 31 at the Energy & Resources Institute in Gurgaon. For more information contact Dr. Morven McLean (mamclean@agbios.com) or Dr. Vibha Ahuja (biotechdelhi@vsnl.com).

CALENDAR OF EVENTS (INDIA)		
Event	Date	Place
GM Food Safety Assessment Workshops	27-28 May 2005	Chennai
	30-31 May 2005	Gurgaon
Communications Training for Agriculture Extension Personnel	8 June 2005	Gujarat
	August 2005	Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh
	September 2005	Maharashtra
GM Food Safety Conference	September 2005	New Delhi

## MEETING OF COMMUNICATORS

**O**n April 15, 2005, SABP hosted a meeting of agencies involved in ag-biotechnology communication activities in India. The meeting was attended by representatives of Agricultural Biotechnology Support Program II, AGBIOS, All India Crop Biotechnology Association, Asia-Pacific Consortium on Agricultural Biotechnology, Biotech Consortium India Limited, Indian Council of Agricultural Research, Indira Gandhi National Open University, International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications and the TATA Energy Research Institute.

**T**he meeting provided a platform for these agencies to share their ideas and activities for biotechnology communication in India and to discuss concerns and issues related to this field. Participants used the meeting to identify potential collaborations and to minimize duplication of efforts. A communication matrix was initiated to reflect the project focus areas of the agencies and help identify potential collaborations and gaps in stakeholder outreach efforts.



Dr. Bhagirath Choudhary (ISAAA) and Dr. Anushree Gupta (BCIL) at meeting of communicators in New Delhi

## SABP COMMUNICATION WORKSHOPS

**S**ABP is planning state level communication workshops for Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. The Gujarat workshop takes place in Vadodara on June 8, 2005.

**T**he main purpose of these workshops is to strengthen the trainers' understanding of biotechnology so that they are better equipped to answer farmers' questions on agricultural biotechnology. The program will provide accurate and balanced information on the technology India and the world. Participants will receive information handouts as resources for their extension work.

**F**or more information on the Gujarat workshop and the other state-level workshops contact Ms P. Mehta-Bhatt (P\_mehta\_Bhatt@rediffmail.com).

CALENDAR OF EVENTS (BANGLADESH)

Event	Date	Place
Workshop on Field Testing of Genetically Engineered Plants	May 23-25, 2005	Dhaka
ISAAA Risk Communication Workshop	June 2005	Dhaka
Compliance Management Training for Confined Field Trials	TBA	
Assisting in the Development of a Field Trial Code of Practice	June-August 2005	
GM Food Safety Conference	September 2005	New Delhi

**WORKSHOP ON EXPERIMENTAL FIELD TRIALS OF TRANSGENIC CROPS IN BANGLADESH**

A three-day workshop on Experimental Field Trials of Transgenic Crops in Bangladesh will be held in Dhaka, Bangladesh from May 23 to 25, 2005. This workshop will be organized jointly by the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC), Ministry of Environment and Forests (MOEF) and South Asia Biosafety Program (SABP). The main objectives of this workshop are:

- To improve the capacity of scientists and risk evaluators to prepare and assess applications for experimental confined field trials of transgenic crop plants.
- To introduce how confined field trials are managed in other countries including approaches taken to managing risks.
- To consider ways to standardize the review process for biotech crop field trial applications in Bangladesh including the roles of relevant government bodies.

This workshop will focus on the specific, important and immediately relevant need to assist in the development of an administrative and scientific review process for confined field trials in Bangladesh and on the development of risk mitigation measures to permit their safe conduct. This workshop will be of value to scientists and other developers wishing to conduct field trials, regulatory and government officials involved in reviewing applications and field inspectors and seed certification agency people.

The workshop will be conducted by local as well as invited expert scientists from Canada, India, Philippines and Pakistan. Different case studies on field trials and risk assessment in various transgenic crops will be investigated through group discussion.

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**ISAAA RISK COMMUNICATION WORKSHOP**

A 2-day Risk Communication Workshop will be organized in the first week of June, 2005, by ISAAA in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Scientists and relevant stakeholders will be given exposure to effective communication techniques so that they may be

able to act as competent communicators on crop biotech activities.

**BANGLA VERSION - GLOBAL STATUS OF COMMERCIALIZED BIOTECH/GM CROPS: 2004**

The Executive Summary of the Global Status of Commercialized Biotech/GM Crops written by Dr. Clive James, Chair, International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications (ISAAA) is translated in Bangla language. The Bangla booklet can be downloaded from <http://www.isaaa.org/>. The hard copy can be obtained on request to Prof. Dr. K. M. Nasairuddin (k.nasairuddin@isaaa.org).

**ISAAA-BANGLADESH LAUNCHES WEBSITE AND GROUPMAIL**

Bangladesh Biotechnology Information Centre (BdBIC) launched its website <http://www.bdbic.org/> in April 2005. National and international stakeholders will be able to access information about biotechnology issues in Bangladesh at the website, which will also be linked with its parent site <http://www.isaaa.org/> and to the partner organization <http://www.agbios.org/> and others.

Similarly, BdBIC opened a groupmail in March 2005 for information dissemination and discussion on biotechnology. Among other things the groupmail is provided with regular Bangla translated versions of Weekly Crop Biotech Updates wired by ISAAA Knowledge Centre, Philippines.

**BANGLADESHI BIOTECHNOLOGISTS AND POLICY MAKERS ATTEND SABP SPONSORED WORKSHOPS**

Bangladeshi scientists and policy makers attended workshops on biosafety and GM technology organized by SABP in Hyderabad, India, and Colombo, Sri Lanka.

A Regional Workshop on South Asia and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety was held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, from April 8 to 10, 2005. This workshop was organized by the Ministry of Environment of the Government of Sri Lanka under the UNEP/GEF project. Dr. Md. Abdur Razzaque, Member Director (Crops), Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC) and Prof. Dr. M. Imdadul Hoque, SABP Country Coordinator for Bangladesh attended the workshop with the support of SABP.

SABP Workshop on the Safety Assessment of Genetically Modified Foods was held at ICRISAT, Hyderabad, India April 14 and 15, 2005. With the support of SABP a six-member Bangladeshi team comprising biotechnologists in different disciplines and policy makers attended the workshop.

While in India the Bangladeshi participants visited laboratory facilities on GM technology at ICRISAT, Center for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB), Hyderabad and Bose Institute, Kolkata.

## TRANSGENIC CROPS TO BE INTRODUCED SOON IN PAKISTAN

Business Recorder - April 9, 2005

Pakistan is set to enter into the age of transgenic crops as Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission will provide 40,000kg basic seed of transgenic cotton varieties to ten seed companies for its multiplication and sale to the cotton growers. This was disclosed by Dr. Kausar Abdullah, Member Administration and Bio-sciences, Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission (PAEC) while talking to newsmen during his visit to the National Institute for Biotechnology and Genetic Engineering (NIBGE).

He said that various research institutes of PAEC had developed a number of high yielding and disease resistant varieties of various crops. "Out of it 23 are ready for marketing".

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## PAKISTAN BIOSAFETY RULES RELEASED

Mr. Fazal Hakeem, Section Officer (Dev), of Ministry of Environment, Govt. of Pakistan released the final draft of Pakistan Biosafety Rule through a Notification (S.R.O. (I)/2005) issued in April, 2005. With the approval of this Rule, scientists, developer and private companies may be able to perform field trials of transgenic crops.

## SABP SPONSORS DELIGATES TO SEASIA COMMUNICATION WORKSHOP

A two-day Workshop on Risk Communication was organized by ISAAA at Tagaytay City, Philippines April 18 and 19, 2005. Professor Syed Hadiuzzaman, University of Dhaka, Department of Botany and Convenor of the Core Committee of Biosafety Guidelines Preparation Committee, attended the workshop with the support SABP. Professor K.M. Nasiruddin, Bangladesh Country Coordinator, ISAAA also attended.

## SOWING SEEDS OF AGRO REFORM

SHAH A. DADAMEAH - Star Online - May 2, 2005

Long sidelined by investors and snubbed by science students, the Malaysian agriculture sector is now looking up with the injection of fresh ideas and new standards established to draw in big bucks and more professional talents. Agriculture and Agro-based Industries Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said that among the moves would be the appointment of agriculture attaches (similar to trade representatives) in key areas overseas to promote Malaysia's agricultural produce and investment opportunities in the sector.

There are ambitious plans to increase crop and livestock production, get state governments to provide land for prospective investors and train farmers to be more market savvy. The biotechnology policy launched by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi on Thursday to tap the country's rich biodiversity resources would also be a major impetus to the growth of the agriculture sector in coming years.

Malaysia, he added, had to ascend to a higher level of agriculture – value adding, processing, marketing, packaging, export of quality products and biotechnology. "We have to look at new crops, new plants, new animals and lots of other things based on the experiences of developed countries," he said.

See the full article at: <http://www.agbios.com/news.php>

## INDIA'S COTTON OUTPUT LEAPS THIS YEAR

Tehran Times - May 4, 2005

Indian cotton farmers could not have asked for more: excellent weather, hybrid seeds and fewer pest attacks. The result was a record crop in 2004 that boosted incomes. Now with an ideal year behind them, farmers are gearing up to repeat the success story. "Cotton is the best bet," said S.Jaipal Reddy, a farmer who owns 50 acres, or 20.23 hectares, of land in the southern Andhra Pradesh state. "I am going to double the area under cotton this year."

Cotton output in India, the world's third largest producer, has risen by nearly 25 percent to around 22 million bales this year from the last crop year that ended in September. One bale is equal to 170 kg.

India's decision to allow cultivation of genetically modified cotton seeds in the northern states of Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan has also sparked farmer interest. "Seed companies are advertising in a big way and farmers are keen to try out the new technology," said Rakesh Rathi, a trader from Abohar, the key cotton trading centre in Punjab.

Seed companies expect the area under genetically altered cotton, which protects the plants against the bollworm pest, to jump three-fold from 1.3 million acres this year.

See the full article at: [http://agbios.com/sabp\\_main.php?action=ShowNewsItem&id=6480](http://agbios.com/sabp_main.php?action=ShowNewsItem&id=6480)

## MONSANTO BT COTTON VARIETIES REASSESSED

aljazeera.net - May 4, 2005

India has barred Monsanto Company and its Indian partners from selling three varieties of genetically modified cotton in the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh. The federal regulator, Genetic Engineering Approval Committee, refused to renew licenses for the sale of three Monsanto Bt cotton varieties in Andhra Pradesh state, because they had been found ineffective in controlling pests there, said Suresh Chandra, the committee chairman.

However, the seeds can be sold in other Indian states, Chandra said.

The Andhra Pradesh state government also asked Monsanto to compensate farmers who it said lost money by sowing its transgenic cotton. Monsanto disputed the claim.

See the full article at: <http://www.agbios.com/main.php?action=ShowNewsItem&id=6478>

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