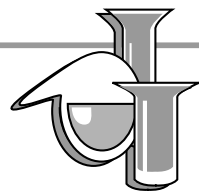


Science In Our Lives



Biotech Foods: Some Simple Facts

by Dean Kleckner

(NAPSA)—“Mathematics is the only science where one never knows what one is talking about nor whether what is said is true,” quipped the philosopher Bertrand Russell some years ago.

That’s certainly the feeling I had way back when my teachers were trying to instruct me in trigonometry. Small wonder I decided to become a farmer instead of a mathematician.



These days, however, I’m experiencing a sense of déjà vu as I listen to Europeans talk about biotechnology—except that this time, they’re the ones who are confused, not me. So many of them don’t seem to know what they’re talking about.

That’s why Lord Henry Plumb is such a breath of fresh air. Lord Plumb is a former president of the British Farmer’s Union, a dairy farmer and a long time friend of mine. But also, as a former president of the European Parliament, he’s a major figure in European and world politics. Recently, he applauded the decision by the United States and a dozen other countries to file a complaint with the World Trade Organization over the European Union’s unfair moratorium on approving new biotech foods.

“Politicians and consumers should be made aware of the evidence confirming the safety of biotechnology,” he said. “The anti-biotech campaigners must not be allowed to reiterate unsupported arguments and rekindle consumer fears.”

Plumb once chaired the European Parliament’s committee overseeing relations with developing nations. Agricultural biotechnology is crucial to them. He said: “New technology can help these countries overcome environmental challenges, including drought and salinity, and fight the diseases and pests such as viruses and worms which destroy their crops.”

The developed world has much to gain as well. “Farmers and consumers in Britain and Europe can benefit from reductions in crop pests, a diminution of the need for chemical use and enhanced nutritional value from food,” said Plumb. “Biotechnology can protect wheat—one of Europe’s major crops—against viruses, funguses, and toxins that can destroy harvests and make wheat unfit for food.”

Plumb also confronted the accusation European consumers and farmers are hurt by the WTO complaint. “It is the European ban on genetically modified foods which is keeping advanced products out of the hands of farmers and consumers—and that is denying the essential freedom of consumer choice.”

These are all excellent points, made by a man with enormous credibility to speak about them. They come on the heels of another important set of remarks, delivered by President Bush in a recent commencement address.

“We can also greatly reduce the long-term problem of hunger in Africa by applying the latest developments of science,” said Bush at the Coast Guard Academy. “By widening the use of new high-yield bio-crops and unleashing the power of markets, we can dramatically

increase agricultural productivity and feed more people across the continent.”

The president continued: “Our partners in Europe are impeding this effort. They have blocked all new bio-crops because of unfounded, unscientific fears. This has caused many African nations to avoid investing in biotechnologies, for fear their products will be shut out of European markets. European governments should join—not hinder—the great cause of ending hunger in Africa.”

The facts are simple. Biotechnology is a miraculous tool that can help us feed a growing world and protect the environment. It has remarkable potential in developing countries, which often have trouble nourishing their people and face constant pressure to convert wilderness into farmland. And it is perfectly safe, as a great number of scientific studies have proven.

As Mickey Kantor, U.S. trade representative under President Clinton, recently said: “It is a technology that can have a positive effect on world hunger.”

I don’t think it can be put in terms any simpler than that. So when will the Europeans quit acting like this is so complicated?

Truth About Trade and Technology (www.truthabouttrade.org) is a national grassroots advocacy group based in Des Moines, IA formed by farmers in support of freer trade and advancements in biotechnology.

Dean Kleckner is Chairman of *Truth About Trade and Technology (TATT)* and former President of the *American Farm Bureau* (1986-2000). He currently owns a corn and soybean farm in North Central Iowa.