

# GMO Debate A 'Non-Issue,' Say Grain Managers

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**CAMP HILL** (Cumberland Co.) — Most grain suppliers support biotechnology and see the current problems over genetically modified crops as a "non-issue," according to several managers Tuesday.

"It's hard to maintain a campaign against a product that (creates) no damage," said Dan Wolf, president of the Pennsylvania Master Corn Growers Association (PMCGA).

Wolf spoke during a panel of grain elevator and supply managers to about 140 growers and agri-industry representatives. The panel was part of the Pennsylvania Corn and Soybean Conference at the Radisson Penn Harris Hotel and Convention Center in Camp Hill.

Dick Cole of PACMA, Palmyra, noted the issues that were brought up at the recent World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle, Wash. and at recent meetings in Canada regarding GMO — genetically modified organism — crops are a "non-issue" for us, he said.

GMO crops have been altered at the genetic level to provide specific, targeted expressions against weeds or resistance to herbicides. Bt corn that controls European corn borer is one such GMO-type crop. Other crops include the Roundup herbicide ready crops for corn and soybeans.

"Not one buyer asked for non-GMO corn," said Cole.

While some elevators have received a few inquiries regarding availability of non-GMO crops, at this point, Cole told growers, "I would not change planting intentions."

According to the panel, some controversy has been felt by the food processors. The controversy is so strong that it has affected food-grade, human-consumption corn, some of which is marketed for trademarked brands of tortilla chips and other products.

"Wenger's supports biotechnology," said Geoff Finch, purchasing agent for the feed company in Rheims. Finch stressed that Wenger Feeds is responsive to customers. If customers want to go non-GMO, "we'll go non-GMO," he said.

Wenger's has had only one serious inquiry into the availability of non-GMO feed. Right now, there have been no other requests, so the non-GMO program is on hold, Finch said.

Trouble is, not one customer or supplier is "willing to make a commitment up front to go (with non-GMO crops)," said Finch.

Wolf of PMCGA spoke about one major grain supplier that looked closely at the issue and realized what the problems could be. "Do we want to segregate non-GMO crops and hope for a premium price?" he said.

For PACMA, Cole noted that buyers simply want cheap beans more than anything, he said. "If you're producing beans, we'll sell them for you."

Cole believes the concern falls more on the "farmers' side than buyers." He's hoping that the public relations people for the big GMO companies "can make it a non-issue."

One industry representative

noted that the industry has been modifying crops through genetic selection for a long time. Most crops can be considered "GMO" by that definition.

"This issue will have to die on its own attrition," said Wolf. "There will be no one to continue to beat the drum."

## Ethanol Issue

Wolf, however, noted that the real issue facing growers are recent decisions by U.S. Congress to consider pulling away from the use of reformulated gasoline, which is blended with an oxygenate such as ethanol, made from corn.

The reason? Some findings suggest that another oxygenate used, methyl tertiary butyl ether (MTBE), has been detected in drinking water supplies from Maine to California. An Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Blue Ribbon Panel has recommended that MTBE use be substantially reduced.

However, several bills pend-

made up only 12 percent of the labor force and farmed an average of 216 acres. In 1990, farmers made up only 2.6 percent of the workforce yet farmed, on average, 471 acres.

"The emphasis on production agriculture is very apparent in the 20th century," he said.

Since science continues to support new product development, growers should benefit. But every bushel the USB can take out of the carryover, the more the price can be affected.

Agriculture is changing. Instead of the emphasis on a supply-driven economy, the shift is toward a "demand-driven" system, Lewis said.

With the 50-cent per bushel checkoff, out of a year's projected harvest of 3 billion bushels, enough money is generated over 20 years to surely "do something to raise the price of soybeans," Lewis said.

Those include new products such as the "polyoils," by-



Speakers at the crops conference included Gene Lewis, United Soybean Board, right and Greg Roth, Penn State corn specialist.

ing in Congress could override the workings of the Clean Air Act to reduce the use of the blended material, essentially allowing waiver authority to individual governors. If the bills pass, this could have "tremendous impact on the use of corn in the country," Wolf said.

"If we lose all the oxygenated fuel programs, it will be a big loss."

Wolf urged growers to contact the National Corn Growers Association or individual U.S. representatives about the issue.

## Ag Perspectives

### — Soybeans

Soybean producers should grasp the potentials of GMO crops, according to the chair of the New Uses Committee of the United Soybean Board (USB).

Growers should "accelerate the accelerating rate of change that GMO can give us," Gene Lewis told those at the crops conference.

A soybean producer from Hardinsburg, Ind., Lewis said the real issue about GMO is "how long will it take for biotechnology to be accepted?"

Lewis noted that growers should do more planning of their destinies. Farmers need to reassess things, "all of us, as a group."

Lewis said that in 1900, farmers made up 38 percent of the labor force and farmed 147 acres on average. By 1950, farmers

products such as hydraulic oils from soybeans. The goal is to have eight new soybean products by the year 2005.

Today people are eating more soy foods than a year ago.

A diesel fuel additive uses a mixture of soybeans and additives. It creates a horsepower boost and improves the life of engines.

Another product includes a plastic resin composite used on the panels of a commercial combine company.

The use of industrial soybean oil has increased significantly, Lewis said, from 28 million bushels per year to 54 million bushels in 1999.

Also at the conference, Tony Minnich, Ag Chem, provided information about the new lightbar technology for growers. The lightbar acts with a GPS system to provide precise parallel swathing for sprayers or other use. The bar can be accurate to about six inches, according to several users, with the right satellite system.

With the technology, growers could feasibly spray at midnight. If kept powered and dry in the cabin, the lightbar can keep swathes almost perfect.

Some lightbars are equipped with actual speed indicators. The information can be downloaded into a computer and more accurate spray records can be kept.



Soybean contest winners at the Pennsylvania Corn and Soybean Conference were, from left, Gary E. Truckenmiller, first place; James R. Hoover, second; and Joe Anchor of Anchor Farms, third.

## Awards

The Five-Acre Corn Club awards were presented by the PMCGA at the conference. Award winners are included in a separate story.

Also, winners of the annual Pennsylvania Soybean Yield Contest were announced.

First place went to Gary E. Truckenmiller, Northumberland County, with a yield of 73.34 bushels per acre using RR Pioneer 93B53.

Second place went to James R. Hoover, Perry County, with a yield of 71.77 bushels per acre with RR Pioneer 9396.

Third place was awarded to Anchor Farms, Inc., Union County, for Stine 3171-1.

STS cultivars made up 12 percent of the entries; normal, 32 percent; and Roundup Ready, 56 percent. Minimum tillage was used by 60 percent of the entries, no-till by 36 percent, and conventional till by 4 percent.

Corn planters were used by 32 percent of the entries and drills by 68 percent.

Beans were planted May 10 by 44 percent of the entries, May 11-20 by 48 percent, May 21-30

by 4 percent, and June 1 or after by 4 percent.

Those using 30-inch rows made up 24 percent of the entries, 14-15 inch 16 percent, and less than 10-inch rows, 60 percent.

Drills averaged 182,000 plants per acre. Corn planters averaged 156,000 plants per acre.

Those using rhizobia inoculant made up 96 percent of the entries. No one rotary hoed. Ninety-six percent of the growers in the contest did not cultivate. There was little or no lodging reported. One hundred percent of the entrants reported good to excellent weed control.

Regarding fertilizer, 44 percent used fertilizer or manure, 12 percent used some nitrogen, 16 percent used phosphorous, 36 percent used potassium, and 8 percent used sulphur. Seventy percent applied phosphorous and potassium or manure to the previous crop.

Only 16 percent limed in the contest year and 16 percent limed the previous year. Fifty-six percent of the entrants reported a current soil test.

## Brown Swiss Association Hosts Annual Calf Sale

FREDERICK, Md.—This year's Mid Atlantic Brown Swiss Calf Sale will be celebrating its 26th year, and will be held on Saturday April 29, 2000 at the Frederick Fairgrounds, Frederick, Md. at 10:30 a.m. This annual sale has gained quite a track record for calves sold. Many have developed into National Bell Ringers, All-Americans, and profitable additions to many herds.

Now is your chance to consign a calf to this sale—check those calf pens and pedigrees and see what you can offer. This sale has been a great place to buy a 4-H project, and has also provided some top-pedigreed calves for the merchandising and investment buyer. We are looking for a strong group of calves that combine a unique blend of production and sound type.

Don't miss this opportunity to get a consignment in this sale. There were several consignments from the 1998 and 1999

sales that went on to do well for their new owners. Many that were shown stood in the first five placings of their class on a state and national level.

If you are interested in consigning a calf, or wish additional information about the sale, please contact: Cindy Warner (301) 371-5206; Dennis Smith (301) 845-6894; Howard Fleming (301) 475-3440; Harold Long (301) 271-7577.

Please don't delay—the sale committee would like to have the pedigrees by Friday March 17, 2000 to get the catalog completed in plenty of time for interested buyers to review. Consignments will be on a "first come-first-serve basis," so don't delay! Remember to tell new 4-Hers, other breeders in your area about the quality and success of this sale—there is always something for everyone!! The Brown Swiss breed is on the move up, and the interest and demand for Brown Swiss is really growing throughout the United States, as well as world wide.