NABC Report 11

World Food Security and Sustainability: The Impacts of Biotechnology and Industrial Consolidation

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for exploring issues in
agricultural biotechnology

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NABC Report 6, Agricultural Biotechnology & The Public Good (1994)
The tremendous success of the 11th annual meeting of the National Agricultural Biotechnology Council would not have happened without the planning committee at University of Nebraska-Lincoln, headed by Donald P. Weeks, whose hard work and thoughtful oversight ensured that all details were covered. Joining Dr. Weeks were the following individuals, who enthusiastically assumed and accomplished their assignments: Sondra Atkins; Eva Bachman; Steve Baenziger; Ricardo Barrera; Sharon Beachell; Chuck Francis; Carol Hegel; Leon Higley; Jim King; Jean Klasna; Karen Henricksen; Darrell Nelson; Martin Massengale; Vicki Miller; Dick Perrin; Anne Vidaver; Rita Weeks; and Dan Wheeler. In addition, we thank Garth Youngberg of the Henry A. Wallace Institute for Alternative Agriculture for his assistance in program development.

Special thanks goes to the workshop facilitators who helped guide the meaningful discussions by workshop attendees: Ted Hartung; Tom Franti; Patty Hain; Ellen Paparozzi; Susan Fritz; Delores Harder; Dennis Brink; Linda Price; John Markwell; Dan Duncan; and Eric Arnold. We also recognize Ray Wiiki for his attentive design of this report and his oversight of its production.

And finally, our sincere thanks go to James R. Fischer, Clemson University, NABC Chair 1998-1999, whose leadership, support and guidance enabled us to successfully do our jobs.

Ralph W.F. Hardy  
NABC President

Jane Baker Segelken  
NABC Executive Coordinator

December 1999
When the National Agricultural Biotechnology Council (NABC) was established in 1988, its goals were the early identification of agricultural biotechnology issues and their discussion in an open forum; the safe, efficacious and equitable development of the products and processes of agricultural biotechnology; and the development of public policy recommendations. Today, with a membership that includes 30 of the leading not-for-profit research and educational institutions in North America, the NABC still strives to identify and consider in open forum the major issues, and provide all stakeholders — including representatives from academe, government, industry, public interest, farming, and others — the opportunity to speak, to listen, and to learn.


In 1999, the NABC meeting was hosted by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, with co-sponsorship by the Henry A. Wallace Institute for Alternative Agriculture, on June 6–8. The meeting focused on the impacts of biotechnology and industrial consolidation on world food security and sustainability. This was the first major national meeting in which this high profile area was discussed. Agricultural biotechnology is at least, in part, driving consolidation of the agrichemical and seed input companies and even catalyzing initial integration of these companies into the food and industrial products area. A major question both nationally and internationally is how world food security and sustainability will be affected by these major changes? The NABC11 presentations and discussions addressed this and related questions.

Leaders from relevant and diverse organizations — World Bank, consolidating agri-input companies, Institute for Sustainable Agriculture, farmer/grower organizations, Center for Rural Affairs, the Hudson Institute, the USDA, and the White House Science and Technology Policy Office — shared their views with an even more diverse group of attendees. The attendees included traditional and organic farmer/growers, industry representatives, consumers, university faculty, students and administrators, state and national agency/government representatives, elected representatives, and leaders and members of public
activists groups, including, for example, a leader of the Greenpeace organization. In the workshops, each attendee had the opportunity to voice their concerns, and also to listen and to learn. This report contains the summary of the workshop discussions and the plenary presentation.

Concerns ranged from the necessity of agricultural biotechnology to meet ever-expanding world food needs to the impact of corporate agriculture on farmers and growers. Surprisingly, the workshops did not identify food safety as a concern, in contrast to concerns expressed by the popular press with respect to public interest group statements. We believe the reports in NABC11, both workshop and plenary, provide an excellent source of information and issues regarding the subject.

Candid forums such as NABC11 help to promote better understanding of the many diverse viewpoints, and provide an opportunity for addressing concerns about agricultural biotechnology. The 2000 NABC annual meeting — “The Biobased Economy of the Twenty-First Century: Agriculture expanding into Health, Energy, Chemicals, and Materials” — will be held May 11–13 in Orlando, FL. The meeting promises to provide participants the chance to dialogue and debate the impacts of emerging technologies that will fuel our economies in the near and distant futures.

In 1999, the NABC produced the NABC Statement 2000 on Agricultural Biotechnology: Promise, Process, Regulation, and Dialogue to provide a concise but comprehensive statement regarding agricultural biotechnology. This statement invites individuals and organizations with concerns and stakes in agricultural biotechnology to participate in an open forum discussion of pivotal issues. The goal of NABC in this effort is to ensure that society, in terms of quality of life, security of food supplies and environmental sustainability, will benefit maximally from agricultural biotechnology while incurring minimal risks. The statement is included as an appendix of this NABC Report.

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