

PART I

WELCOMING REMARKS

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## Welcoming Remarks

ALAN WILDEMAN (UNIVERSITY OF GUELPH, GUELPH, ON)

*Host of NABC 16*

Why a topic like this? About a year ago when we were thinking about what NABC 16 could be about, we asked the question that everybody is asking themselves in different ways: “What is the role of agriculture for the future, for people’s lives, for food, for livelihoods?” This brings the recognition that agriculture touches every human being on the planet. Of course, that sounds trite to say; but it’s absolutely true. We decided to focus the discussion on biotechnology and agriculture back on those kinds of issues—that one could argue indisputably are important to every person on this planet—and to try to put the discussion into a context that is as broad as possible.

So, while we fully anticipate that there will be people who view the issue strictly from the standpoint of whether or not biotechnology is good or bad or whether or not it violates some principle, we wanted to create a meeting within which that discussion could occur, but could occur against a backdrop of safe and healthy food and the environment and the quality of life for people wherever they may be, and we are extremely delighted that NABC agreed that we could host it at Guelph. We are particularly delighted that so many speakers and attendees have come from so far away to visit Guelph. And for all of those who can’t hear me because they aren’t here, we miss you. A number of people wanted to come and couldn’t for various reasons. We recognize that travel is complicated at the best of times, and while we at Guelph think we are at the center of the universe, we sometimes realize that that is not quite true.

I would like to sincerely welcome everyone here and hope that you enjoy your stay. I have had a chance to meet a number of you and I’m sure will have a chance to meet a lot more. It’s very important to us that the university gets to act as host. To the best of our gracious capacity we will try to make your stay here as pleasant as possible and I hope that you have a productive time, a great meeting, and we come out of it with lots of reason to pause for thought about what we do and why we do it, and perhaps rearticulate why we do what we do and where we stand when we sit or where we sit when we stand. Welcome and enjoy your meeting.

STEVE PUEPKE (UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS, URBANA-CHAMPAIGN, IL)  
*NABC Chair, 2003–2004*

I work for the University of Illinois and it's been my privilege to have served as the Chair of the National Agricultural Biotechnology Council for the past year. We are glad that you are here to take part in our annual meeting. Our theme is *Agricultural Biotechnology: Finding Common International Goals*. Why are we emphasizing the global context?

Winnipeg, May 21, 2004: Monsanto Canada today welcomes the decision of the Supreme Court of Canada in ruling that the subject matter claimed within its patent for RoundUp Ready® canola falls within the patent act—that Mr. Percy Schmeiser of Bruno, Saskatchewan, infringed that patent.

Bruno, Saskatchewan, May 22: “The Supreme Court handed down their decision yesterday and I have mixed emotions to it,” writes Mr. Percy Schmeiser. “I do not have to pay Monsanto one cent for profits, damages, penalties, court costs or their technology fee. On the bigger issue of whether or not their patent was valid, the court ruled that it is and we have to accept that judgment. For this to be changed, our parliament will have to act.”

Copenhagen, a few days later: An expert panel including three Nobel Prize winners convenes to ask how the world could best spend its resources to help developing countries. Number 5 on that list is “Development of new agricultural technologies to combat malnutrition.”

Geneva, June 2: Government lawyers from the United States, Canada and Argentina tell the WTO that the EU moratorium on GMOs violates international agreements on trade barriers.

Brussels, June 9: The EU issues a written report saying the lawyers are wrong.

Delhi, 1 day earlier: The task force on applications of biotechnology and agriculture headed by Dr. M.S. Swaminathan, from whom we will hear later this afternoon, presents its report to the Indian minister of agriculture. “Biotechnology,” says the report, “holds the promise to double food production, ensure adequate nutrition and rid Indian small farmers of poverty.”

Bangalore, 1 day later: “The report is problematic,” says Greenpeace India. “It suggests a dangerous non-scientific approach to regulating gene constructs and it threatens India’s native varieties and valuable exports such as organic and basmati rice. The report fails to recognize that co-existence of genetically engineered and non-engineered plants is impossible.”

Will the farmers be freed of poverty? Are the lawyers wrong? Is co-existence really impossible? Will parliament act? And what will be tomorrow morning’s agbiotech headline? Stay tuned, listen intently—as this audience always does—and ask lots and lots of questions. Thanks very much for being here. Enjoy.

## RALPH HARDY

President, NABC

It is certainly a pleasure to come back to Guelph. Fifty-plus years ago, I was a student at the forerunner of your current institution and I always enjoy my opportunities to return to Guelph, to my roots if you will. I am a dual citizen, a Canadian as well as a naturalized US citizen, and my wife and I spend about 5 months each year in Ontario enjoying the summer. I'm also a small family farmer outside of Toronto, so I have a little bit of a feeling of the reality of what growing soybeans and wheat and all those things are about. We are certainly pleased that the University of Guelph has selected the topic of agricultural biotechnology and specifically *Finding Common International Goals*.

Where do we have commonality across the more-developed and the less-developed worlds? For those for whom this is the first NABC meeting let me give you a few background pieces of information. We are a thirty-seven-member consortium. We are composed basically of what I would call the senior management of most of the not-for-profit agricultural research institutions in Canada and the United States. Collectively our council members probably spend in their jurisdictions somewhere between \$2 billion and \$3 billion a year in agricultural research, so it's a pretty significant group in terms of public-sector research.

The objective of NABC is to provide a safe, efficacious, and equitable development of agbiotech. Our annual meeting is an open forum. It always has been an open forum and I think we are rather unique—possibly singularly unique—in terms of providing an open forum to discuss issues of agbiotech, and as you've heard from Steve's comments, those issues continue to exist. Over the years we've addressed consumer issues, bio-based industrial products, risk, public good, environment and food safety, among others. Our format is to provide plenary speakers who describe the broad domains of the area that is being considered, and we have workshops where each and every one of you have an opportunity to speak. But if you speak, we ask that you also listen. We realize that that is a little more difficult for all of us; I know it is for me. And then the most difficult thing we ask of you is to learn. I don't think I've come to an NABC meeting and departed with exactly the same viewpoints as I came with, so I hope we will all be impacted as our understanding of these issues expands.

Each year we print about 5,000 hard copies of the proceedings volume, including the plenary talks and the workshops. Each of you will receive one of those and we provide them free to anyone who wants a single copy. Recently, I was talking to the vice-chancellor for international affairs at one of our member institutions who commented: "What we've seen in terms of genetically engineered soybeans and corn and cotton and canola says clearly there are benefits. But those benefits are mainly at this stage in terms of the more developed world. What we've got to figure out is how to do the sorts of things—and I think it's going to involve hugely the public sector—that will allow more transfer of those benefits that will help the rest of the world." I trust you will have a great meeting and thank you all for being here.

