



Brazil Delays Vote on Gene-Altered Crop Amid Protest (Update2)

By Carlos Caminada

March 22 (Bloomberg) -- Brazil postponed a vote on whether to approve Bayer AG's gene-modified corn seeds after Greenpeace International protesters stormed the meeting.

Members of the environmental group entered the closed-door session held by the government's biotechnology council and demanded to participate in the talks, said Gabriele Vuolo, coordinator of Greenpeace's campaign against gene-altered seeds.

"We believe these sessions must be open to the public because they will have an impact on people's lives," Vuolo said in a phone interview from Brasilia. "The transgenic corn will end up on the plates of Brazilians."

Brazil, which allows farmers to plant gene-altered soybeans, hasn't yet approved corn engineered to resist bugs and weed killers. Monsanto Co. and DuPont Co., the world's leading developers of genetically modified seeds, are also pushing to get approval for their products in Latin America's biggest economy.

The South American country is the world's second-biggest soy producer and third-biggest corn grower.

Vera Canfran, the biotechnology council's spokeswoman, confirmed that the meeting was interrupted by protesters and said the vote will be postponed until April 18.

"It made no sense for them to be there," Canfran said in a telephone interview from Brasilia. "They were there to create turmoil."

Biotech Crops

Brazil is home to a 10th of the world's genetically modified crops. Planting of biotech crops in the country, including herbicide-tolerant soybeans, jumped 22 percent last year to 11.5 million hectares, the non-profit International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications said in January.

Bayer's LibertyLink corn seed, already used by farmers in the U.S., Argentina and other countries, may help Brazilian growers boost yields because it produces plants that resist strong herbicides also made by the German company, said Andre Abreu, biotechnology manager at Bayer's crop science division in Brazil.

"We expect the seed to boost productivity in Brazil," Abreu said in a telephone interview from Sao Paulo. "It contains a protein that nullifies any effect of the herbicides on the corn plant."

Abreu declined to comment on the incident in Brasilia today. Bayer is Germany's biggest drugmaker.

Approval Delays

Delays in approval of seeds and other research may thwart President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva's plan to invest 10 billion reais (\$4.9 billion) in biotechnology over the next decade to fuel growth in agriculture and other industries, said Alda Lerayer of the University of Sao Paulo.

Repeated protests and court injunctions have prevented the country from ruling on biotechnology developments and will likely discourage investments, she said.

"Companies and researchers will not run the risk of investing money and time when the rules don't

work," said Lerayer, a biotechnology professor at the university. ``This is bad for the country."

Brazil's Senate on Feb. 27 passed a bill allowing the biotechnology council to approve new seeds by a simple majority, instead of the previous two-thirds majority, in a bid to speed up rulings.

To contact the reporters on this story: Carlos Caminada in Sao Paulo at at ccaminada1@bloomberg.net .

Last Updated: March 22, 2007 14:57 EDT

