

NEWS: WORLD TRADE

US agriculture secretary attacks EU labelling plan as a restriction on trade

Genetic products row worsens

By Maggie Urry

A European Union proposal to label genetically modified agricultural products is "unacceptable" and would restrict trade, according to Mr Dan Glickman, US secretary of agriculture.

Mr Glickman said that he had told Mr Franz Fischler, the EU agriculture commissioner, that any plan to label products as containing genetically modified organisms would involve segregating a bulk commodity and would be impracticable and "clearly trade-inhibiting".

After that meeting, Mr Fischler said he understood US concerns but that European consumers wanted to know what they were eating. The Commission would discuss the issue and put forward proposals in a few weeks, he said.

Mr Glickman used a speech to the International Grains Council conference in London yesterday to stress:

"We will not tolerate segregation" of genetically modified crops from traditional products."

He said while he respected European consumers' concerns over public health, "sound science must trump passion".

He continued: "Test after rigorous scientific test has proven these products to be safe".

Mr Glickman said food labelling should relate only to health risks. The US would consider any proposals on labelling which were not discriminatory but so far had "not seen a label that meets the test".

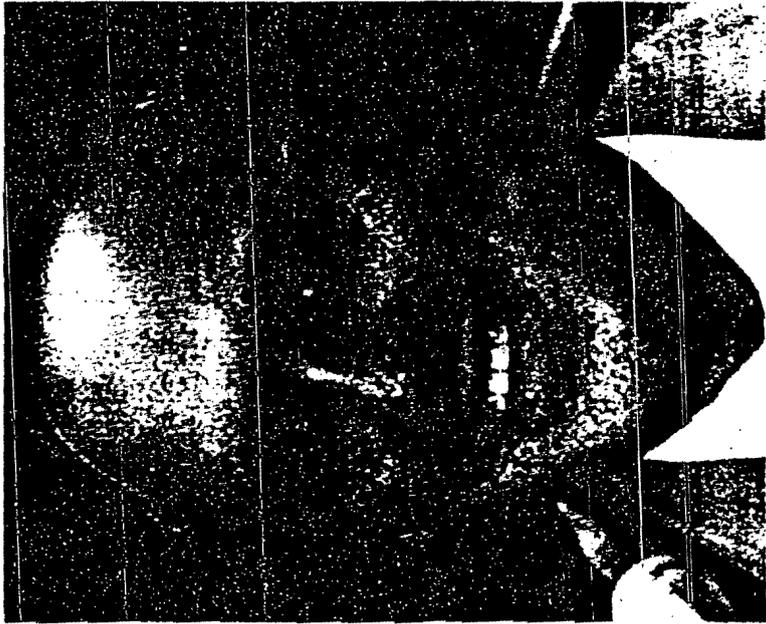
He said that European supermarkets which were pressing for labelling should not "fall prey to emotion." Rather than calling for segregation of the products on behalf of their customers, they should educate consumers that the products were "safe and good for the world".

He said that US farmers had found genetically modified crops gave sizeable savings in pesticide use, had reduced water consumption and increased yields. This year between 5 and 10 per cent of plantings of soybeans and corn in the US were of genetically modified seeds.

He said European farmers would be at a competitive disadvantage if they did not grow the new crops.

Only through the use of biotechnology could the world feed its growing population, he said.

Nearly half the world's crops were destroyed by pests and diseases. Growing pest-resistant crops would alleviate world hunger, reduce pesticide damage to the environment, and save rain forests from being cleared for food production, he claimed.



Glickman: "Tests proved genetically modified products safe"

LEVEL 1 - 11 OF 23 STORIES

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February 21, 1998, Saturday

SECTION: Religion; Pg. B6;

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HEADLINE: New corn hybrid reduces animal waste phosphorus

BYLINE: CURT ANDERSON Associated Press

BODY:

WASHINGTON -- Phosphorus in animal manure could be reduced by 40 percent, and farmers might save money on feed, because of a new corn hybrid aimed at cutting water pollution, researchers said Friday.

"We believe we can get to the market with a product that's going to meet the needs of the animal, the producer and be better for the environment," said Bill Neibur, corn research director at Pioneer Hi-Bred International, an Iowa-based seed company.

Agriculture Department officials announced the corn hybrid along with President Clinton's new clean water initiative, which would update the Clean Water Act that expired in 1992.

This is great news for those of us who want to reduce the amount of nutrients running into our waters," Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman said.

Phosphorus in animal manure -- particularly from large-scale operations like corporate hog farms -- is carried into lakes and streams by rainwater. It can cause unnaturally high growth of algae and other organisms, killing fish and creating oxygen-depleted dead zones.

Chicken manure runoff is suspected in an outbreak of fish-killing pfiesteria piscicida last summer in Maryland tributaries of the Chesapeake Bay. The microbe is also blamed for killing millions of fish in North Carolina.

The corn hybrid was developed and patented by an Agriculture Research Service geneticist in Aberdeen, Idaho. Pioneer signed the first license to develop the corn for commercial use and hopes to have it ready by 2000.

"USDA is making this technology widely available to maximize its environmental benefits and boost farm income," Glickman said.

The USDA geneticist, Victor Raboy, said regular corn contains plentiful amounts of phytic acid. That stores phosphorus in an unusable form in animals with one stomach -- including chickens and hogs -- meaning that much of it winds up in their manure.

The new hybrid reduces phytic acid by two-thirds, which can cut phosphorus in chicken and hog manure by between 25 percent and 40 percent. At the same time, the animal is able to absorb more phosphorus into its body as a nutrient, reducing the costly need for farmers to add it to feed.

The Herald-Sun (Durham, N.C.), February 21, 1998

The low-acid corn plant is undergoing tests to determine whether it has desirable yields and resistance to pests and disease.

The corn feed would have little impact on cattle and other multiple-stomach animals. They have an enzyme that breaks down phytic acid and already absorb more phosphorus into their bodies.

LOAD-DATE: February 23, 1998

BUSINESS/FINANCE

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 30, 1999

Washington Appeals to France in Food Dispute

By Barry James

International Herald Tribune

PARIS — The U.S. agriculture secretary, Daniel Glickman, appealed to the French government on Tuesday to help avert a trade war between the United States and Europe on a growing list of issues such as biotechnology and beef hormones.

Mr. Glickman said that the U.S. ambassador here, Felix Rohatyn, had suggested that the agriculture secretary travel to France for the discussions to avoid an impending "train wreck" on the trade disputes with the United States.

France annoyed the U.S. administration last week by seeking to force a moratorium on admitting new genetically modified seeds or crops until the European Parliament has had a chance to debate the issue, probably months from now. Environment ministers rejected the French proposal, but did agree on complex labeling and monitoring requirements that some analysts said would be almost as onerous for the biotech industry as a formal moratorium.

Meanwhile, Stuart Eizenstat, the nominee for the second highest job at the U.S. Treasury Department, said that the European Union's resistance to genetically-modified foods and agricultural products is the biggest trade threat faced by the United States.

"Almost 100 percent of our agricultural exports in the next five years will be genetically modified or combined with bulk commodities that are genetically modified," Mr. Eizenstat testified before the Senate Finance committee. The EU's fear of bioengineered foods and farm commodities is "the single greatest trade threat that we face," he added.

Mr. Eizenstat told the Senate panel that the United States had urged the European Union to create a food safety regulatory structure with rigorous scientific standards and procedures modeled after the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

He said a top U.S. priority at the upcoming round of world trade talks was eliminating export and internal subsidies for agricultural products. Australia, New Zealand and developing countries with

agricultural exports are expected to join Washington in pressing the EU to phase out subsidies, he said.

Mr. Eizenstat made only a passing reference to a long-simmering dispute with the European Union over imports of U.S. hormone-treated beef, saying that Washington hoped to "amicably" resolve the trade issue.

He said the U.S. government found it difficult to get answers from the European Commission, executive body of the European Union, on these and other issues relating to the approval of new products, and was therefore turning directly to the French agriculture minister, Jean Glavany, for help. Mr. Glavany's spokesman was unavailable for comment.

In his comments, Mr. Glickman said, "It is not yet fundamentally clear always who is in charge and who you talk to about these problems."

"One of the reasons we came here is because we believe that the French are in a particularly important role in a leadership capacity on agriculture. We felt it was important that they assert themselves in this leadership role in Europe

— not that they would have to agree with us on everything. But we need this point country in Europe to help us deal with some of the resolution of these particular problems."

Mr. Glickman said the talks would lead to further bilateral meetings between the United States and France.

After a tough round of farm talks in the European Union earlier this year in which the French negotiators rejected proposals that would have weakened the nation's farm sector, France's views on agriculture are unlikely to sway most other EU nations any more now than they did then, observers said. Mr. Glickman was asked whether in trying to enlist the help of the French, he risked arousing the hostility of the rest of Europe.

"If you don't bring France around on these issues, it's going to be hard to resolve them," he replied. But he added, "We are going to continue dialog with other countries."

Asked how he reacted to possibly irrational fears about safety, Mr. Glickman retorted, "So I should just accept that irrationality is the method for mak-



William Lee/The Associated Press

Mr. Glickman says France is a key leader on Europe's agriculture policy.

ing public policy decisions? Where did rationalism begin in the 17th and 18th century? Here! Who was the first food safety expert of the world? Louis Pasteur! Here! My goodness gracious, I understand this. I get irrational about my safety myself — but at some point in a civilized society you have got to rely on systems working themselves out."

Reuters News - FOCUS-U.S., France aim to re...

Page 1 of 2

Top Business News

FOCUS-U.S., France aim to resolve GM food spat

(adds Glickman remarks paras 4-9, 14, Scher remarks paras 15-16, byline)

By Greg Frost

PARIS, June 29 (Reuters) - The top French and U.S. agriculture officials said on Tuesday they will try to sort out differences over genetically modified (GM) organisms before they spiral out of control.

U.S. Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman and French Farm Minister Jean Glavany said members of their staff would meet in the coming weeks to try to resolve the latest in a series of agricultural disputes between the United States and the European Union.

"We agreed today (to) have a process over the next several weeks to talk through these issues and we identified people within our own ministries to carry the issue forward so it doesn't just hang on forever without some serious resolution," Glickman told reporters after he and Peter Scher, the U.S. special ambassador for agricultural trade, met with Glavany.

Glickman said that although the breakfast meeting at the French Farm Ministry had focused on "serious issues" related to food safety, food security and the use of science in agriculture, it was not a formal negotiating session.

Speaking to reporters later at the U.S. Embassy, Glickman warned of serious consequences if the two sides do not resolve their differences on GM foods ahead of the next round of world trade talks scheduled to begin later this year.

"Issues of new technology and biotechnology are far more profound to world trade than beef and bananas," he said, referring to two other agricultural trade disputes that have flared up between the EU and the United States in recent years.

"Unless there is some resolution to this, my belief is that this will create far more serious trade tensions... and we want to get to work now on a bilateral basis to get these sorted out," Glickman said.

EU's ban on gene-altered

BLOOMBERG NEWS

PARIS — U.S. Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman said yesterday the closure of European Union markets to genetically modified crops could escalate into a "serious and expensive trade conflict."

"Unless we find a resolution, my belief is that this will create far more trade tensions than hormone beef or bananas," Mr. Glickman said at a press conference.

Mr. Glickman commented after a meeting with French Agriculture Minister Jean Glavany. France and four other EU governments last week pledged to block the sale of new gene-altered crops in the 15-nation bloc, angering the United

States, the leading producer of the food.

The French-led veto, driven by concern that the altered crops may pose a health risk, inflames trans-Atlantic trade tensions that are already rising over a range of food-safety issues, including a decade-old EU ban on hormone-injected U.S. beef. It also frustrates efforts by Monsanto Co., Novartis AG and other companies to sell genetically modified seeds in Europe.

While Mr. Glavany didn't soften France's stance on engineered foods, he agreed to consider U.S. concerns as the European Union drafts new rules for approval of

crops boosts trade tension

modified crops, the French Agriculture Ministry said.

Mr. Glavany "reiterated the importance of the issue for consumers and for the French and European authorities," while he agreed with Mr. Glickman on "the necessity of simplifying and harmonizing EU procedures," the ministry said.

The issue is crucial to U.S. farmers, some of whose crops are more than 40 percent genetically modified, because they are facing declining prices and profitability and sell more food to the European Union than any other region except Japan.

While U.S. trade officials insist

the food is safe, the Europeans say there haven't been enough tests on the side effects for human and plant health. A practical ban on new genetically modified crops already exists, as the European Union hasn't granted any new approvals in more than 15 months.

The conflict over genetically altered foods follows recent trade disputes that have led the United States to seek hundreds of millions of dollars in sanctions against the European Union.

EU market barriers to genetically modified crops are also costing hundreds of millions of dollars in U.S. exports, said Mary Revelt, the U.S. Department of Agricul-

ture's representative to the European Union.

"We had a \$200 million market for corn in Spain, which has been completely shut off for us as a result of this particular difficulty," Miss Revelt told Bloomberg News in Brussels. She declined to give an overall figure for U.S. exports of genetically altered crops lost due to EU restrictions.

Europe's resistance to corn, soy and other crops designed to resist pests reflects concerns over food safety that were exacerbated by the "mad cow" crisis over contaminated British beef in 1996 and this year's scare over dioxin-tainted Belgian chicken.

U.S. turns spotlight on genetic engineering

"We can't force-feed consumers,"
agriculture secretary says

By **BILL LAMBRECHT**

Post-Dispatch Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — In the planting of genetically changed crops around the world, the U.S. government has done just about everything it can to help except drive the tractor.

Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman has been one of biotechnology's leading boosters, admonishing reluctant Europeans not to stand in the way of progress and urging the acceptance of food grown using the new, American technology. But lately, Glickman has turned cautious. In St. Louis last week, he warned that the United States must pay closer attention to questions being raised around the world about genetic engineering.

"We can't force-feed . . . reluctant consumers," he said.

His words, along with a recent scientific finding that biotechnology may harm butterflies, are helping trigger an emerging debate in this country that could prove pivotal.
See Genetics, Page A10

231

L.A. Times 10/11/99 #16

Turn Down Heat in Food Feud

Genetically modified food had a relatively easy voyage from the laboratory to the fields to the silos. But something happened on the way to the market. The Europeans, who call it Frankenstein food, won't touch it. Some so-called GM crops sold in Europe have to be labeled and others can't be sold at all. Japan, South Korea, Australia and other countries are following suit. The fear of food altered in the laboratory has reached America's shores as well, and whether well founded or not it is forcing producers, farmers and even government regulators to take another look. Addressing some of the concerns raised about GM food, rather than dismissing critics as a bunch of kooks or trade protectionists, is a welcome change.

The benefits of genetically altered crops are many, and most of them are acknowledged even by groups opposed to their cultivation. Corn containing proteins of a bacteria called *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) kills insects that can't be controlled by pesticides. GM crops improve nutritional content, increase yields, make plants resistant to weeds, reduce pesticide use and even make recycling easier.

The U.S. government has tested such crops extensively and found GM food to be as good as any food. Right now, there are 50 "tried and tested" GM plant varieties approved by the Agriculture Department, including cotton, corn, soybeans and rapeseed. Nearly one-half of soybeans and over one-third of corn grown in the United States last year was genetically altered.

But the Europeans, subjected to a handful of food scares unrelated to biotechnology in recent years, have balked. Environmentalists plunder test fields of Bt corn, daily headlines in Britain whip up public hysteria about Frankenfood, and Italian consumers pelt visiting U.S. agricultural officials with Bt soy-

beans. The European Union reacted to the consumer uproar by requiring labels on some GM crop imports and imposing a moratorium on the imports of others. Washington responded by threatening to embroil Europe—its biggest trading partner—in a food fight that could dwarf the spaghetti, banana and beef trade wars of recent times.

The issue has now spread to Asia, and new scientific and commercial concerns are taking root in the United States as well. In a laboratory study, pollen from Bt corn killed monarch butterfly larvae, and soybeans containing a gene from Brazil nuts were found to trigger allergic reactions. The Bt corn tests were not duplicated in field tests, and the modified soybean never made it to the market. But doubts were raised, and now even the regulators are worried.

Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman has acknowledged that there are many questions—scientific and economic—that "haven't been thought of, much less answered." While he and producers of GM seeds blame much of the problem on poor public relations, they are beginning to concede the opponents' concerns as legitimate. He promised to alter his department's decades-old regulatory procedure to give it greater independence from industry and broaden scientific review to include long-term effects of various processes. He even conceded that "some type of information labeling is likely to happen."

Clearly, what's needed now is for both sides of this issue to stop hurling accusations and threatening retribution and start talking. Independent scientists, environmentalists and consumers must be included in the regulatory review. U.S. and European regulators should get together and seek a solution acceptable to both sides. After all, what's at stake is a science that all agree has huge benefits to offer.

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Glickman attempts to ease food fears



U.S. Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman speaks Tuesday at the Ag Trade Center.

By Bert Caldwell
Staff writer

Solid science is the best antidote to fears raised by reports that genetically altered material was found in Northwest wheat shipped to Thailand, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman said Tuesday.

Although the tests that found the contamination have been challenged, the episode has revived concerns about the quality of U.S. commodities.

But agriculture will be high-stakes issue at world trade talks

Glickman and Dorothy Swoskin, assistant trade representative for the World Trade Organization, were in Spokane to discuss the round of trade talks next month in Seattle.

Also on a panel at the Ag Trade Center was Washington Department of Agriculture Director

Glickman said the reaction is an example of the paranoia that erupts in countries without the advanced testing and certification done in the United States. Even the Europeans lack standards, which contributed to the furor earlier this decade over mad cow disease, he said.

Glickman and Dorothy Swoskin, assistant trade representative for the World Trade Organization, were in Spokane to discuss the round of trade talks next month in Seattle.

Also on a panel at the Ag Trade Center was Washington Department of Agriculture Director



Glickman: High tariffs are a hurdle

Continued from A10

Jim Jesernig

"The stakes for agriculture at the next WTO round are enormous," said Glickman, noting that one-third of U.S. farm output is sold overseas.

Washington, which exports most of its wheat as well as large portions of other crops such as apples and hops, is even more trade-dependent, he said.

Glickman said previous trade pacts helped to double farm exports since 1990. But the trend will slow if WTO negotiators do not make more progress, he said.

The major obstacles to export growth are high tariffs and flimsy scientific barriers, he said.

World tariffs on farm goods average 50 percent, Glickman said, compared with 8 percent by the U.S.

And U.S. export subsidies are less than 5 percent, compared with 85 percent by the European Union.

Glickman said the main goal of U.S. negotiations, backed by other exporters, will be to merge the Europeans away from their costly export programs.

"We just have to be relentless," he said.

Glickman said the U.S. also will challenge Europe over the "precautionary principle," which has stirred

should be ready in about two weeks. On other matters, Glickman said:

■ The Clinton Administration is reviewing U.S. policy toward Pakistan, one of the most important markets for Northwest wheat.

The civilian, democratic government was overthrown in a peaceful military coup a week ago.

Nuclear tests there and in India a year ago briefly threatened continued grain sales to Pakistan.

■ China and Japan worry about dependency on outsiders for food.

"They must understand that we will be a reliable supplier," he said, adding China never will be able to feed its 1.2 billion people without imports.

■ The Clinton administration will be discussing ways of modifying the 1996 Freedom to Farm Act with Congress.

The law was intended to reduce farmer dependence on federal assistance, but two years of severely depressed commodity prices have forced Congress to enact multi-billion dollar relief packages.

"I'm not sure the public is going to tolerate this year after year after year."

Changes might encourage farmers to rotate more land out of production, or plant crops on land on which they collect support checks.

■ Bert Galbreath can be reached at (509) 459-6450 or by e-mail at bertb@spokane.com

controversy over issues such as the use of steroids to fatten U.S. beef.

Glickman believes bioengineering will be a must if the world is to feed all of its people in the future. But consumers must share that belief, he said, and the way to create that faith is to back it with science.

After all, he said, consumers have long embraced genetically engineered drugs.

Jesernig said bioengineered crops can increase yields, thus reducing pressure to cultivate marginal lands.

He said the regional reaction to Thailand's contamination finding was "a little bumpy," but not bad considering the suddenness of the report.

Genetically altered crops are grown in isolated plots. They are supposed to be destroyed after the seeds are harvested for additional research.

Jesernig said the U.S. Wheat Association had other groups are studying how to shorten the response time on future incidents.

Isti Siddiqui, Glickman's trade adviser, said the samples tested by the Thais could have included material from contaminated silos or ships, or other crops.

The University of Idaho is conducting separate tests of the same lots tested by the Thais to determine what, if any, genetically altered material was present. Siddiqui said results

Unstoppable biotechnology to be polemic WTO topic

106

By Robert S. Elliott

SALVADOR, Brasil, Oct 28 (Reuters) - Biotechnology growth is an "irreversible" and "controversial" trend thanks to its cost-saving allure and promises to be a hot topic at the upcoming World Trade Organization talks in November, officials said Thursday.

"It has been a controversial issue in the European Union and we expect it to be an item for discussion at the WTO," Richard Rominger, deputy secretary for the United States Department of Agriculture, told reporters.

"Consumers around the world are concerned about the issue and we have not done a good enough job (providing) a better understanding of the technology," said Rominger, one of the participants in a meeting here of agriculture officials and ministers from 34 countries across the Americas.

Farmers have been drawn to genetically modified (GM) grains because of the "unprecedented opportunities to improve crops, reduce pesticide and water use, protect the environment and enhance food security worldwide," he said.

But factions, particularly in Europe, have railed against the dangers of proliferating "frankensteins foods."

"(Biotechnology) is generating some of our most complex and contentious trade challenges," said Rominger.

"We will see a growing anxiety over genetically altered foods and increasing trade tensions," said Anne MacKenzie, deputy director of the Canadian Agency of Food Research.

"Consumers will step up calls for food labeling on bio-engineered foods," she added.

Besides the United States, a hot spot for genetically modified crop use has been Brazil and Argentina. The three countries are the largest producers in the world of soybeans, a top GM crop.

In Argentina gene-soy dominates 70 percent of the 1999/2000 crop and will hog a higher percentage in the future due to "exponential" growth, said Jorge Castro, strategic planning secretary for the Argentine government.

"It's an irreversible trend," said Castro.

GM soy is illegal in Brazil, but that hasn't stopped farmers in the south from smuggling up to 2.5 million acres (one million hectares) worth of the seed from the United States and Argentina according to seed associations.

"It's not easy to brake a global technological trend - it hasn't occurred throughout history, much less now," said Castro. At some point GM soy will have to be legalized in Brazil, he opined.

"If you look at what's happening with the grain production in Brazil you will see that the trend is increasingly more accentuated towards the authorization of transgenics," said Castro.

There will be two kinds of farmers in the future, he forecast: those who profit using GM crops and those who don't.

"In the medium and long term grains not using transgenic seeds will have a differentiated production. They're going to be something on the order of specialty brands, probably at a higher price," Castro said.

Rominger saw unlimited biotechnology break-throughs on the horizon.

"The next generation biotech products promise to offer additional advantages, such as consumer foods and livestock feeds with improved nutritional value, and material made of sturdier, wrinkle-resistant, and/or fire-retardant fibers," he said.

"At some point down the road, biotech products could replace nonrenewable resources, such as fossil fuels, with renewable ones," Rominger surmised.

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[B] US ag director says transgenic products to be hot topic at WTO

By Lisa Wheeler. Bridge News

Salvador, Bahia--Oct 28--Biotechnology will be a very controversial issue in the World Trade Organization conference in Seattle next month, but if better scientific information reaches EU consumers, there may be less concern for genetically modified products. Deputy Agriculture Secretary Richard Rominger said.

Rominger was participating in the Inter-American Agriculture Cooperation Institute conference here in northeastern Brazil on the goals of the 34 American countries at the World Trade Organization conference in Seattle next month.

The US has one of the largest crop productions of transgenic products. The government said European concern over the environmental and health effects of transgenic products are mute, considering all of the scientific evidence provided by the US.

"Consumers are definitely interested in the issue of transgenic products, and we all haven't done our part to give those consumers the information they need to make an informed decision," he said.

Currently, Brazil is the largest soybean-producing state, which doesn't already plant genetically modified soybeans or corn. An Argentine agriculture official Wednesday said the Argentine soybean production is nearly 70% genetically modified, a number some analysts would call lower than the actual figure.

US farmers are just beginning to obtain premiums for non-transgenic soybeans, but premiums around the world are still few and far between.

Jorge Castro, the Strategic Planning secretary for the Argentine government, said Argentina has no problem if Brazil does not begin planting transgenic products.

"If there is a premium offered for those products, then Brazil has won a market," he said. "In the meantime, we are cutting our production costs considerably with by planting transgenic crops." End

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EU to outline beef hormone proposal soon - Glavany

101

WASHINGTON, Nov 8 (Reuters) - The European Union will outline its idea for resolving a decade-old dispute with the United States over hormone-treated beef in "a few days," French Agriculture Minister Jean Glavany said Monday.

Speaking with reporters after a meeting with U.S. Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman, Glavany also said both countries agreed ahead of upcoming world trade negotiations that nations have a "sovereign" right to subsidize farmers.

Earlier this year, the World Trade Organization gave the United States permission to impose \$116.8 million in retaliatory duties on EU products because of the EU's continued refusal to lift a ten-year-old ban on beef from cattle raised with artificial growth hormones.

In recent weeks, however, U.S. cattlemen have indicated interest in replacing the retaliation with a temporary compensation package from the EU, possibly in the form of increased market access for U.S. beef from cattle raised without growth hormones.

Glavany said he was not at liberty to discuss details of the upcoming beef proposal, which EU officials have promised to make before the WTO ministerial meeting in Seattle. But as an EU member, France would support whatever is proposed, he said, speaking through a translator.

On another subject, recent U.S. approval of a \$8.7 billion aid package for farmers would "not necessarily" hurt the U.S. negotiating position going into the WTO talks, Glavany said.

The issue for those negotiations is not whether countries have a right to subsidize their farmers, but which types of subsidies are legitimate, he said.

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Growing furor over 'Frankenfoods'

Rally in Mission protests genetically altered crops

By Vanessa Hua
OF THE EXAMINER STAFF

ON A BRISK November evening, an acoustic guitar player revved up the crowd jammed in the seats, the shell-well and out the door of the Mission District performance space. "Avoid ingesting killer tomatoes," he sang. It was a throwback protest

against the technology of the future — genetically altered crops.

The rally at Artista Television Access included scenes portraying capitalist pigs and bioengineered women, plus a game show, pin bowling and educational videos.

However falty the nose-ringed, dreadlocked and thrift-shop-garbed activists may have seemed, they were at the forefront of a growing U.S. movement that is sending tremors through the biotech industry.

The issue will likely undergo a trial-by-protest at the World Trade Organization talks opening Tuesday in Seattle, where Bay Area activists are expected to join thousands of labor and environmental demonstrators

here.

Among the topics to be discussed at the four-day WTO meeting are agricultural subsidies, tariffs on lumber and other logging products, WTO patent regulations, labor rights and genetically altered foods.

Protesters against genetically modified crops are concerned about the technology's impact on food safety and the environment.

U.S. objections have not reached the frenzied pitch seen in Europe, where much of the public rails against so-called "Frankenfoods."

Still, more Americans have started to raise questions about bioengineered crops. Recent polls suggest that more than 80 percent of Americans

[See BIOTECH, B1]



EXAMINER / DON STOKELY

Sharon Medall as "Pig Queen," 149, and Micho Messerheimer as "Capitalist Pig" from Heteromixolators attend a meeting to protest bioengineered foods.

A section of the *San Francisco Chronicle* Editorial

◆ **BIOTECH from D-1**

Furor over 'Frankenfoods'

calls for labeling of such crops, many of which are already sold in supermarkets in the form of packaged foods.

The biotech industry maintains its products hold much promise, enabling farmers to grow high yield crops and reduce pesticide use.

However, the opposition sparked by activists has shed a cloud over the commercial potential of costly research by Monsanto, Novartis, DuPont and other companies, analysts said.

"Monsanto and the rest of the industry has driven into a big pothole," said Sano Shimoda, president of BioScience Securities, an investment bank in Orinda. "They said the concerns that erupted in Europe couldn't happen here, but there's no question it's going to escalate in the U.S."

Or, as speaker Britt Bailey told the cheering throng of 120 at the anti-genetic engineering rally earlier this month: "The (companies') stocks are plummeting because of us. We bring sales down. Our letters work."

Monsanto spokeswoman Karen Marshall defended her company's research.

"It's been a very popular technology with farmers, becoming a basic part of agriculture on all five continents," Marshall said. "It has a lot of benefits."

A decade ago, biotech companies began a spending binge that banked on a future where unlocking the secrets of genes could pay off with new foods and drugs. Now, analysts say, how the industry navigates the controversy in the next year will help determine the success of that strategy.

The companies must answer to consumer advocates demanding long-term testing and mandatory labeling, farmers who want assurances on the marketability of their modified crops, Wall Street analysts scrutinizing their investments and federal agencies monitoring the technology.

This juncture comes just as U.S. policymakers begin to evaluate the controversial issue amid international squabbling over a new generation of products.

At this week's talks in Seattle — which will include officials from 135 nations — U.S. representatives will press the European Union to ease de facto trade barriers on certain types of genetically altered crops. Europe's highly politicized regulatory system has stalled the approval on new varieties of such crops.

Earlier this month, members of Congress proposed legislation requiring labeling on packaged foods with genetically altered ingredients, as well as inspections during processing.

Likewise, the Food and Drug Administration — which regulates biotechnology along with the Environmental Protection Agency and

the U.S. Department of Agriculture — began scheduling public meetings on biogenetically modified crops on set for Dec. 13 in Oakland. Although these agencies maintain there are no known health risks on genetically modified crops, the USDA has pledged to research the long-term effects.

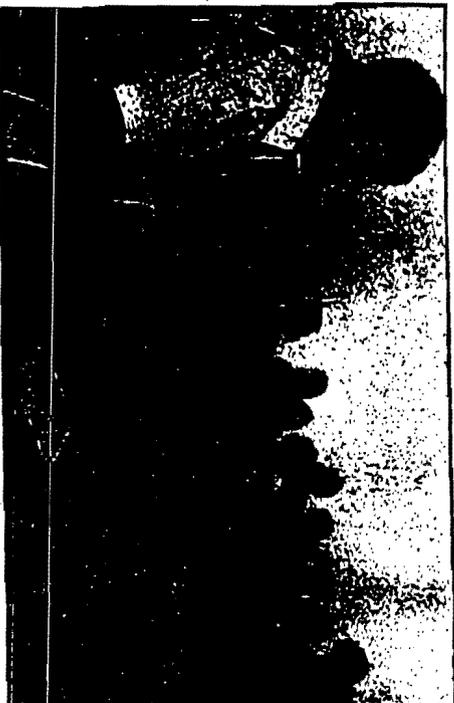
"The state of agricultural science catastrophe — whose stock prices are fluctuating despite their profitability — contrasts to their position in 1996 when they were touting their research. By inserting a gene from another organism with the desired trait, scientists created soybeans resistant to abnoxious weed killers and corn and cotton with built-in pest protection.

Monson — whose Chief Executive Officer Robert Blagrove was snatched with a bolt cream pie by protesters in The City last year after giving a speech on the wonders of biotechnology — has drawn much fire from activists worldwide, who claim the company is pushing its products too quickly without enough testing. The St. Louis company is a leader in agricultural biotechnology research and, as a result, is being closely watched.

"Monson is so heavily indebted and placed so much of its resources behind this technology, that its future is tied to the future of this issue," said Steven D. Lynder, Lydenberg and Donohui in Boston.

With the motto, "Good Health, Hope," Monson claims to leverage its biotech research into pharmaceutical and agricultural products. The company sells the popular Roundup herbicide and the fast-selling new arthritis drug, Celebrex.

Monson's stock dropped to \$32.75 at the end of September,



DAVIDSON/JOHN STONE
Though perhaps not as memorable as "We Shall Overcome" or "Victims Reg," Jeremy Clark roused up a Mission District crowd earlier this month with "Chemical Resistance," a dirty protesting genetically altered crops.

down from from \$50.81 in the spring. It closed at \$44.64, up 50 cents, last Friday.

"Certainly the stock for a long time did not reflect the value of the drug business. This agricultural business is weighing it down," said Marc Goldstein, an analyst with CIBC World Markets. She also attributed the drop in the company's shares to the worldwide decline in crop prices.

Producers who buy these high-tech seeds are wary watching consumer attitudes. Although genetically altered seeds accounted for more than half the soybean crop and more than a third of the corn crop this year, some growers may hold back on the technology they once so readily adopted for the savings in labor and pesticide costs.

"I believe there will be a mass exodus of farmers from genetically modified organisms," said Gary Goldberg, chief executive of the American Corn Growers Association, which predicts that the acre-

age planted with these kinds of seeds will drop by 30 to 35 percent. Whether farmers will need to segregate genetically modified fields to prevent cross-pollination, separate the kind of crops at food processors or sell old-fashioned crops at a premium also adds to the uncertainty, he said.

Officials at the American Soybean Association had less doubt. Producers, spokesman Bob Callahan said he was confident that the demand for genetically altered soybeans would remain strong, similar to the organic sector.

Groves, in California, the nation's leading agricultural state, expressed concerns about being caught in the middle of the battle between producers and companies.

Although much of the state's production consists of non-genetically modified fruits, vegetables and tree crops, farmers are concerned about the negative reaction to biotechnology, said Clark Biggs, a

spokesman for the California Farm Bureau.

"If we look into the future, the ability of the world to support itself depends on increased production," Biggs said. Biotechnology will play a large role in higher yields, he added.

Meanwhile, activists are stepping up pressure in the United States. The Washington D.C.-based Turning Point Project, a coalition of non-profit, spent \$150,000 on five full-page ads in October and November in the New York Times denouncing genetic engineering as fostering disease.

This fall, guerrilla protesters destroyed test plots they deemed a biohazard at UC-Berkeley and UC-Davis, as well as at Novartis Seeds and Vegetables and DuPont's Pioneer Hi-Bred International Seeds and Vegetables in Woodland. Most of the destroyed plants were not even genetically modified, the researchers said — a symbol of the troubling lack of understanding between some activists and the biotech industry.

These extreme confrontations do not represent the views of most people who question genetically modified foodstuffs. Industry watchdogs said biotech companies need to start addressing mainstream concerns.

Rather than spout claims of saving the earth, companies should highlight current environmental benefits such as reduced chemical uses on pest-resistant crops, said Carl H. Feldbaum, president of the Biotechnology Industry Organization in Washington D.C.

"Companies shouldn't overstate, saying they'll feed the world," Feldbaum said. "They have to start with what they can prove."

In October, Monsanto's Shapiro conceded in remarks to Oneworld in London that his company had failed to communicate effectively.

"Our confidence in this technology and our enthusiasm for it has, I think, widely been seen — and undeniably so — as overconfidence or indeed arrogance. Because we thought it was our job to persuade, too often we forgot to listen," Shapiro said.

"The industry is trying now to fight the backlash. By early next year, the Wilmington, Delaware DuPont will form an advisory panel of environmental and biotech leaders to guide the company's business decisions and monitor activity in public reports, the company said.

Officials at Monsanto and at Switzerland-based Novartis also pledged to do a better job of communicating with the public.

In some ways, the industry's task is no less arduous than the research behind its scientific innovations. The genetic modification issues likely will remain unresolved for years to come amid a jangle of social, religious, environmental and food safety concerns, experts said.

Reflecting how entrenched the controversy already has become in pop culture, a recent episode of the TV cartoon show "The Simpsons" featured the " Monsanto" — a four-lettering yet highly addictive combination of tobacco and tonettes.

Indeed, the fundamental nature of the issue is what has drawn so many people from different backgrounds into the debate.

Said David Sherwood, a 51-year-old newsletter researcher from Oakland: "This goes beyond politics. Everyone has to eat."

USDA Unit, Seeds of Man.

Ideas

According to legend, a Canadian farmer found the mutant cauliflower in his garden. There was no mustard in it. It was orange—not just a yellow color, not just a peach blush. It was orange. Like a Caribbean sunset.

The plant breeder who gave me the seed said the farmer grabbed it from the field and gave it to an extension agent (for its Canadian equivalent), who gave it to a scientist. The molecular biologist David Garvin. That was 30 years ago. Garvin, who works for the Agricultural Research Service, is looking for the genetic trigger that enables the mutant to produce 500 times as much of the nutrient beta-carotene as regular cauliflower. "It tastes the same," he said.

This year, with a budget of \$834 million, the Agriculture Department's research arm is maintaining 100 different labs around the country, including Garvin's. If you grow it and sell it, then someone at ARS is working on it.

ARS is not small-time. These are the scientists who invented frozen orange juice, permanent-press cotton and potato flakes, and who first mass-produced penicillin.

But these days, the research budget is longer. Bioengineering has taken on new significance to onetime curiosities such as Garvin's cauliflower. The quest for "value-added" agricultural products has led to new uses for yesterday's throwaways. And antipollution laws have made environmentalism a business necessity.

At the ARS's Plant, Soil and Nutrition Laboratory in Ithaca, N.Y., Garvin is searching for the cauliflower mutation gene because beta-carotene is an important source of Vitamin A and has properties that may reduce the risk of some types of heart disease and cancer. Finding a "gatekeeper" gene in cauliflower, Garvin hopes, will enable him to mutate other crops that people will eat more readily.

Appalachian Fruit Research Station in Kearneysville, W. Va., ARS horticulturist Richard Bell has already used a soil bacterium gene to grow about six dozen



ARS developed the sweet Bluebird cauliflower, which is named for Sen. Robert C. Byrd (D-W.Va.).

dwarf Bosc pear trees, which are 18 months old and about one-fourth the size of normal trees.

He hopes the trees will be a squat eight feet tall with fewer branches, but with normal-sized fruit. Plant them six feet apart instead of the usual 12, and the grower will enjoy breakthrough yields.

It will take a couple of years to determine whether the degree of dwarfism will be economically useful," said Bell, who worries that his trees are too small. It's no good if the itty-bitty tree produces itty-bitty fruit.

Although biotechnology may be research's leading edge, ARS has many projects based on rethinking old knowledge, finding uses for the formerly useless, or just exploiting simple country hunches.

ARS soil scientist Henry P. Maryland, for instance, knew that plants accumulate starches and sugars during sunny days, so that forage is much richer in nutrients at dusk than at dawn.

But "I wondered if animals could tell the difference," said Maryland, a researcher at ARS's Northwest Irrigation and Soils Research Laboratory in Kimberly, Idaho.

So he cut grass and alfalfa in the morning and in the afternoon, and dried and shipped the samples to ARS researchers in North Carolina to give to cattle, sheep and goats. Every diner made a beeline for "the p.m. hay."

Now he said, "we'd like to find out what they're eating on," but that's extra. By harvesting at dusk, farmers can improve nutrient content by 15 percent to 30 percent, which "is worth \$1 million per cutting of alfalfa in California," Maryland said.

Another easy moneymaker appears to be Central American corn, which is becoming the forage of last resort in the American Southeast when unseasonable cold weather delays the spring planting of domestic corn.

In the past, dairy farmers substituted sorghum, but "cows don't like sorghum," and discontented cows eat less and give less milk, said plant physiologist Joseph Burns of the ARS plant research unit in Raleigh, N.C.

But they like Central American corn. "You can plant it later, grow it through a dry spell in June or July, and cut it for silage in early October," Burns said.

Better still, Central American corn grows faster in the United States because summer days are longer at higher latitudes. Its yield per acre is 15 percent lower than that of U.S. corn, Burns said; otherwise farmers might forget about U.S. corn altogether.

Plant peculiarities are also what prompted ARS scientists at the Appalachian Farming Systems Research Center in Beaver, W.Va., to focus on the lowly chicory, a sometime salad green and a bitter additive that makes weak coffee seem stronger.

It turns out that chicory, with a deep taproot and a highly developed fibrous root system, loves nitrogen and phosphorus. "Just slurp it up," said animal research scientist Kenneth E. Turner.

This is not necessarily a good thing, since nitrogen and phosphorus are agriculture's two most important plant nutrients, but in a fertilized forage field, chicory acts as a policeman. The grass uses the nitrogen it needs, then chicory's deep taproots suck up the excess before it runs off as contaminated groundwater.

Other low-end products with newfound uses are nutshells, which ARS research chemist Wayne Marshall is studying as a source of "granular activated carbons" to cleanse factory effluent of organics or heavy metals.

Coconut shells and coal are industry's usual carbon filters, but these are expensive, at least relative to nutshells, which nut processors "just want off the property," Marshall said.

At ARS's Southern Regional Research Center in New Orleans, Marshall heats shredded nutshells and pits them with acid so they look like tiny asteroids. A one-gram piece of shell can have up to 900 square meters of surface area.

Hard shells, such as walnuts, hazelnuts, pistachios and especially macadamias, are great for leaching benzene, acetone and other organics, Marshall said, although he doesn't know why. Soft shells—almonds and pecans—are preferred for metals such as lead, cadmium and mercury.

For the latest in waste management, though, research leader Patricia D. Millner at the Soil Microbial Systems Laboratory at ARS headquarters in Beltsville has high hopes for pasteurized manure.

Millner is experimenting with a closed-bin system pioneered for sewage treatment by a Toledo-based firm, N-Viro International. It uses an auger to mix manure with a high-alkaline waste product such as lime kiln dust, coal ash or cement dust.

The resulting reaction generates enough heat to kill *E. coli*, *Cryptosporidium parvum*, salmonella and other pathogens and breaks the mix down into ammonia gas and a dry, grayish, odorless, alkaline substance that serves as "a good starting point" in building soil in an acidic environment, Millner said. "You're using two by-products to make one useful product."

122

Imported plants, bugs carry peril, USDA says

'Monumental' menace costs billions

By Stevenson Swanson

NEW YORK — Standing in a small Manhattan park that was devastated last year by Asian longhorned beetles, Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman said Tuesday that keeping non-native species from entering the U.S. is vital to protecting the country's natural resources and public health.

Kicking off a four-day cross-country tour to highlight the threats posed by non-native insects, plants and disease-causing microbes, Glickman said a doubling of foreign trade in the last 10 years has made the job of inspecting incoming shipments of plants and animals increasingly difficult and also increasingly important.

"This is a monumental problem," Glickman said, noting that the park where the beetles were discovered is only four blocks from Central Park. "We are concerned that the beetles do not find their way into New York's green treasure."

The tree-killing insects, which also have infested several Chicago-area residential neighborhoods, are one highly publicized example of a continuing wave of new species that have invaded the U.S., often entering in cargo shipments or, in the case of aquatic species, the ballast tanks of cargo ships.

Scientists believe that is how zebra mussels were introduced to the Great Lakes in the late 1980s. Like longhorned beetles and most non-native species, the mussels lack natural predators, leading to a population explosion that resulted in dangerously clogged water intakes at factories, power plants and municipal water systems.

To contain the beetle infestation, nearly 5,600 trees in Chicago and New York have been cut down and chipped. The beetles kill a tree when they burrow deep into its trunk.

The insects, which likely arrived from China inside wood used to hold cargo, were discovered in 1996 in Brooklyn. In 1998, they were found in Chicago, suburban Summit and in DuPage County near Addison.

New York and Chicago are the only American cities known to have colonies of the pests, but Glickman said containing the beetles is criti-

cal to protecting the nation's \$900 million hardwood industry.

On a belated second day of spring, Rep. Carolyn Maloney (D-N.Y.) and Rep. Joseph Crowley (D-N.Y.) joined Glickman in planting a new American Linden tree at Ruppert Park, a small playground where 21 maples were cut down last summer after the beetle infestation was discovered.

David Phimentel, a Cornell University biologist, estimates that non-native species cost the American economy \$137 billion annually, including revenues lost to damaged crops and the cost of pesticides and other controls.



Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman

Currently, farmers spend \$5 billion a year to control non-native weeds, according to the USDA. Such weeds, which cover some 100 million acres now, are spreading at the rate of 3 million acres a year.

In addition, introductions of new bacteria or viruses can pose public-health risks, Glickman said. Last summer, seven people died in New York and at least 62 became sick when they were exposed to West Nile virus, which is spread by mosquitoes and causes encephalitis.

The virus, an African organism that had never been seen in this country, is believed to have been carried in the blood of birds, but it is still a mystery how the birds became infected.

In the wake of reports that the virus has been found in mosquito larvae, local officials are planning aerial pesticide spraying later this year. Glickman said the USDA is allocating \$375,000 to step up surveillance and diagnostic testing in the New York area.

As world trade and travel increase, the problems caused by non-native species in the U.S. are expected to get worse, Glickman said.

"In a global economy, we must fight a global war against invasive pests and diseases," Glickman said.

"Our current system has not kept pace."

INVASIVE SPECIES

Glickman's mission: pest control

USDA secretary will tour four ports to find ways to bar 'aliens'

BY JACK LUCCENTINI

AGRICULTURE SECRETARY DAN Glickman will visit four U.S. ports of entry this week to study ways to boost the nation's inspection system for keeping out invasive pests.

The tour is an effort to draw attention to the growing danger of such imported pests as the Asian longhorned beetle, which has destroyed thousands of trees in the New York and Chicago areas.

For importers, the effort could mean more inspections and regula-

tion.

The whole issue is one we take seriously," Glickman said Friday. "The purpose of this trip is to see what other steps we can take to continue to fight this problem.

The costs of invasive plants and animals to the U.S. economy is estimated by one study at \$137 billion a year, Glickman said.

The problem is getting worse as the volume of trade skyrocketed, and global warming may be turning the United States into a



Glickman

more hospitable climate for many kinds of pests, he added.

The Agriculture Department has requested a 16% increase in funding this year for its invasive-pest inspection and eradication efforts, USDA officials said. Forty-four senators have signed a statement supporting the request, which would raise the funding to \$428 million from \$368 million.

"To ensure we have free international trade we must be ever vigilant," said Michael Dunn, undersecretary for marketing and regulatory programs at the USDA.

In December 1998 the Agriculture Department published a rule requiring that all solid-wood packing material from China be fumigated, heat-treated or treated with preservatives to kill the Asian longhorned beetle. The hardy creature travels in wooden pallets, then chews through trees.

Glickman's tour will cover four port cities:

- New York, a city where Asian longhorned beetles have shown up after most likely entering the country on the West Coast. The beetles have killed two dozen trees in New York's Central Park, he said; the only way to rid a tree of the pest is by destroying the whole tree.

• Miami, where an explosive growth in cargo and passenger movement underscores the growing potential for invasive outbreaks, USDA officials said. The Florida citrus industry has been devastated by the spread of citrus canker, a disease that entered the United States early this century.

• Otay Mesa, Calif., just south of San Diego, where Glickman will watch inspections of incoming freight. Many of the country's fruits and vegetables enter there, he said, adding that he will observe "what resources, if any," should be added for inspection.

• Long Beach, Calif., the nation's busiest cargo container port. Glickman will review unloading and inspection activities and discuss new technologies to improve inspections and facilitate trade, officials said.

The tour is just part of an overall effort by the Agriculture Department to put the nation on a higher alert level.

The Agriculture Department last August issued a 132-page report outlining plans to step up its fight against agricultural pests. It called for new user fees on incoming cargo, increased consistency in inspections, and more responsibilities for importers and exporters.

Since then, department officials have met with several groups around the country with a stake in the plan.

Importers have complained of not having had enough say in the proceedings. There were few representatives of importers on the group that developed the blueprint for change, called "Safeguarding America's Plant Resources."

The Agriculture Department is now accepting comments on the plan through a special Web site set up for the purpose, <http://www.safeguarding.org/>.

The plan's recommendations include greatly strengthening inspection and anti-smuggling efforts at the Canadian and Mexican border, while expediting the entry of historically low-risk products.

Importers' groups have said they agree with some aspects of the plan, such as taking steps to control pest infestations in other countries before they can ever reach the United States. But they have objected to other recommendations, such as raising user fees to pay for it.

Jack Luccentini can be reached at (212) 837-7113 or jluccentini@mail.joc.com

113

Journal of Commerce

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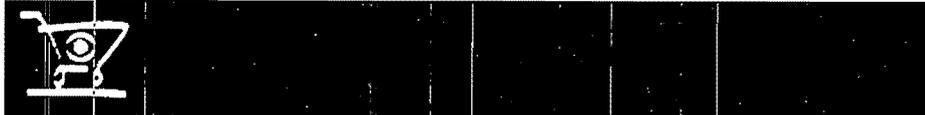
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Canker makes South Florida disaster area

- Dade Farmers, others to get relief
- Thousands of acres destroyed

113

182

South Miami-Dade
Wednesday, March 22, 2000 - 06:36 PM ET



WFOR

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(WFOR) US Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman stepped in to help struggling South Florida Citrus growers, designating Miami-Dade and other South Florida counties as disaster areas because of citrus canker infestation.

Glickman made the designation as he toured South Miami-Dade groves blighted by the bacterial infection, harmless to humans but deadly to citrus plants. The wind-borne bacteria has spread through the region, forcing the destruction of tens of thousands of backyard citrus trees, and most recently, thousands of acres of South Miami-Dade Lime groves.

The disaster declaration means growers will now qualify for aid in replacing their trees with another crop. In most cases, insurance won't cover the costs.

Glickman watches as one grove was burned to ashes,

the only known way to stop the spread of Canker, which is so far incurable.

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252



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Citrus canker: Is your tree next?

• Multimedia: See photos and learn about citrus canker

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- [Feeling the squeeze](#)

Some facts about citrus canker:

► What is it?

Canker is caused by a bacteria that is highly contagious and affects only certain types of citrus trees, mostly grapefruit and key lime.

► The symptoms:

Brown, raised lesions surrounded by an oily, watery-souked margin and a yellow ring or halo. Old lesions in leaves may fall out, creating a shot-hole effect.

U.S. declares South Florida citrus-canker disaster area

By NIALA BOODHOO, Associated Press
Web-posted 3:24 p.m. Mar. 22, 2000

HOMESTEAD -- Visiting, bulldozed groves in an area that once provided nearly all the nation's lime crop, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman warned Wednesday of the danger Florida's multibillion dollar citrus industry faces from an imported, incurable plant disease.

Glickman also declared four South Florida counties an agricultural disaster area because of the disease, citrus canker, which can be stopped only by knocking the trees down and burning them.

"This loss is just as devastating as a drought," Glickman said at a lime grove infected with canker.

The state's \$8 billion citrus industry recently fought canker infestations in the Tampa area and in southwest Florida, and had hoped to have it contained. But inspectors then found several news outbreaks in 70-mile swath from Homestead, southwest of Miami.

South Florida lime growers say they have already lost more than half the fruit of their \$25 million-a-year industry.

Wednesday local growers told

Glickman that disaster area funding would be enough. "I've got low-cost loans from the bank and Andrew, I don't need more loans," said grower Mike Phillips. He said ne



(Wilfredo Lee/AP)

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman, greets Abbott, one of the dogs of the USDA's Beagle Brigade, which are used to sniff out illegal fruits and vegetables brought in at Miami International Airport. Glickman also visited an infected lime grove in Homestead and declared South Florida a citrus-canker disaster area. Wilfredo Lee

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effect.

► **How it spreads:**

It can be spread by wind-driven rain, birds and animals or from moving infected plants, fruit and trees to another location and by contaminated lawn equipment.

► **What happens:**

Spots grow into the rind of the fruit but do not enter the pulp or cause the fruit to rot. In later stages other organisms can enter through the spots and cause the fruit to rot. Once the fruit has a large number of spots, the fruit also begins dropping prematurely.

► **Where to call:**

305-598-6988 or 800-850-3781

► **If you refuse to let state workers in your back yard:**

The state will eventually come back with a police officer.

► **If you are not home:**

Inspectors will walk through on their own. If you have a fence, they will leave a note saying they were there. If you have a

need more loans," said grower Mark Philcox. He said he considers himself lucky that he has lost only a third of his crop to the disease

Glickman, who visited Philcox's grove as part of a nationwide tour emphasizing the dangers of exotic pests, said the USDA is also working on providing compensation to growers. He said there is a possibility of getting money from the Commodity Credit Corp., a revolving fund for agricultural emergencies.

U.S. Congressman Allen Boyd, D-Fla., who was with Glickman, is sponsoring a bill that would provide \$40 million to growers who have lost trees in the eradication effort.

Trees infected with the canker show lesions on its leaves, fruit and stems. Burning the trees, even those exposed but not yet infected, is believed to be the only way to prevent its spread. Growers are not allowed to replant citrus trees, which take up to five years to bear fruit, for at least two years.

Meanwhile, a quarantine is in effect for the South Florida area, blocking shipments of fruit.

Glickman emphasized Wednesday that the USDA is working on broader issues to solve the problem, including cracking down on enforcement and research into killing the canker without destroying the tree.

"The issue here is nonnative invasive species, whether they be this canker or the Asian long-horn beetle," Glickman said. "It's not just here, it's all over the country."

The South Florida strain of canker began spreading after Hurricane Irene hit South Florida in October last year.

The state has already cut down and burned at least 500,000 trees, most of them in Homestead-area groves but including those taken from residential yards in the Miami-Fort Lauderdale areas.

Another 500,000 trees are expected to be cut down.

It will cost Florida an estimated \$175 million to eradicate the canker.

Commercially, the current outbreak has mostly affected the lime industry in the Homestead area, but there is fear in the citrus industry that it will spread upstate and destroy vast groves of orange, grapefruit and other citrus.

State Agricultural Commissioner Bob Crawford, with Glickman Wednesday, said the state is expecting to contribute around \$65 million and he is working with the USDA to match that figure.

"Without the federal government, we couldn't get this done," he said.

On the Net:

To obtain information on applying for loans, go to www.fsa.usda.gov/pas/disaster/assistance1.htm

Broward Southwest

Cooper City

Davie

Miramar

Pembroke Pines

Weston

Broward West

Lauderdale Lakes

Lauderhill

Plantation

Sunrise

Palm Central

Boynton Beach

Greenacres

Lake Worth

Palm South

Boca Raton

Delray Beach

Reference Map

dog in the back yard that could be considered dangerous, they will attempt to reach you later.

SOURCE: David Fleisher, Sun-Sentinel

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Feds declare citrus canker emergency in South Florida

15/2

Web-posted: 7:52 a.m. Mar. 23, 2000

The federal government has declared four South Florida counties agricultural disaster areas as a result of citrus canker damage, making affected citrus growers eligible for low-interest emergency loans from the U.S. Agriculture Department's Farm Service Agency.

The state of emergency, covering Broward, Collier, Miami-Dade and Monroe counties, was announced Wednesday by Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman during a visit to the state's lime-growing region in south Miami-Dade, which has been ravaged by the canker, a highly contagious plant disease.

Glickman and Florida Secretary of Agriculture and Consumer Affairs Bob Crawford met with lime growers and inspected an infected grove in Homestead.

The declaration is the latest in a series of efforts by the federal and state governments to control the rapid spread of citrus canker before it reaches the state's principal orange and grapefruit groves, and to begin providing financial relief to farmers whose crops have been destroyed as part of the citrus canker eradication program.

In recent months, the canker has caused damage officially estimated at \$5 million in lost lime trees and crops in Miami-Dade alone. But growers think overall losses, including investments in groves, maintenance and lost sales of fruit, are higher. Nearly half of Miami-Dade's 3,000 acres of lime trees have either been cut down and burned, or are marked for destruction, because of citrus canker, which weakens citrus trees, reduces fruit output and blemishes fruit.

"Citrus canker is damaging our groves and severely impacting Florida growers," Glickman

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► **How it spreads:** It can be spread by wind-driven rain, birds and animals or from moving infected plants, fruit and trees to another location and by contaminated lawn equipment.

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► **Where to call:** 305-598-6988 or 800-850-3781

► **If you refuse to let state workers in your back yard:** The state will eventually come back with a police officer.

► **If you are not home:** Inspectors will walk through on their own. If you have a fence, they will leave a note saying they were there. If you have a dog in the back yard that could be considered dangerous, they will attempt to reach you later.

SOURCE: David Fleshler, Sun-Sentinel

said. "Emergency loans can help growers get back on their feet after experiencing losses due to the spread of this disease."

But some lime growers think that low-interest loans are not enough, and are seeking direct compensation from federal and state governments.

Bill Patterson, who lost his entire investment when officials ordered the destruction of his 40 acres of lime trees in Miami-Dade, said he now owes the federal government around \$360,000. With the promise of emergency loans, he expects to restructure his debt and obtain some fresh loan money to start a nursery business.

The Department of Agriculture is also considering a \$40 million compensation program that would provide direct payments -- not loans -- to citrus farmers who have suffered damage because of canker. The program must be submitted to Congress for approval.

Joseph Mann can be reached at jmann@sun-sentinel.com or at 954-356-4665.

282

- [Dania Beach](#)
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NEWS

Published Thursday, March 23, 2000, in the Miami Herald

'This is the farmer's worst nightmare'

S. Florida declared disaster zone for canker

BY MARTIN MERZER
mmerzer@herald.com

Ashes from burning citrus trees raining on his head, U.S. Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman declared South Florida a disaster area Wednesday and promised enhanced efforts to block the relentless advance of canker disease through Miami-Dade, Broward and now Palm Beach counties.

The declaration qualifies growers in Miami-Dade, Broward, Collier and Monroe counties for emergency low-interest loans. Canker is destroying much of Miami-Dade's \$20 million lime industry and has been found in Oakland Park, Sunrise, Margate, Coral Springs and other Broward cities.

Despite all efforts at eradication, the tenacious bacteria recently breached a "fire wall" at the Broward-Palm Beach county line. Newly found in Boca Raton, it is creeping steadily toward the heart of the state's \$8.5 billion citrus industry in Central Florida.

"This is just as devastating as drought and other disasters," said Glickman, joined on a tour of south Miami-Dade by state Agriculture Commissioner Bob Crawford and an entourage of aides. "This is the farmer's worst nightmare, what you are seeing here."

As he spoke, bulldozers 30 yards away gathered infected or exposed lime trees. Crackling flames and black smoke rose from a bonfire of toppled trees. White ashes floated from the sky.

Later, Glickman's black leather shoes and cuffed suit pants were sprayed with Galex 1027, a powerful disinfectant. Even a member of the president's Cabinet can sow the disease if proper precautions are not taken.

Though harmless to humans, canker severely blemishes fruit and ultimately damages trees. Easily spread by humans and farm equipment, its wide dispersal almost certainly was caused by the wind and rain of Hurricane Irene last October. There is no cure.

Under a recently fortified \$175 million eradication program, nearly 1,000

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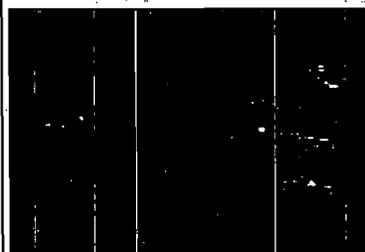
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SEE ALSO



TIM CHAPMAN

FIGHT ESCALATES: U.S. Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman, above, gets his feet sprayed with disinfectant as he tours canker-infested fields in south Miami-Dade. In the same area, below, ash and smoke billow from a burning pile of lime trees in a grove at Southwest 312th Street and 207th Avenue.



TIM CHAPMAN

- [Lawmaker calls for better reparations for homeowners](#)
- [State citrus en route to China](#)
- [Map of canker outbreak areas \(34KB graphic\)](#)

inspectors and tree cutters are rolling through South Florida, removing infected citrus trees and any citrus tree within 1,900 feet of an infected tree.

More than 500,000 commercial and residential trees in Broward and Miami-Dade already have been cut down. All three million citrus trees in those counties could be doomed. If more outbreaks are discovered in Palm Beach County, it could be added to the disaster declaration.

In addition, a quarantine on the movement of residential citrus covers nearly all of Broward and Miami-Dade.

Though somewhat heartened by Glickman's visit, growers called the availability of low-interest loans insufficient.

They told Glickman and Crawford that they deserve federal grants because lax enforcement by U.S. inspectors allowed the disease to enter the area, probably through imports arriving at Miami International Airport.

"We already have enough loans," said lime grower Alcedes Acosta. "They're taking out our groves. To stay in farming, we must have federal compensation."

A \$40 million grant package is being considered by Congress.

Grants and low-cost loans might help lime growers plant other crops, but the overall outlook for agriculture in South Florida will remain grim.

CITRUS HIT HARD

Citrus is all but finished in the region, and vegetable farmers and fruit growers are disappearing at an alarming rate. Vegetable sales in Miami-Dade have shriveled by nearly one-third since 1989.

Wednesday was a particularly bad day for Mark Philcox, owner of the 25-acre grove that was being destroyed as the group watched. Like other lime growers, he replanted after Hurricane Andrew leveled everything in 1992, and his trees were just starting to produce marketable fruit.

Now, the U.S. secretary of agriculture was standing in Philcox's grove, declaring a disaster.

"A day like this is not what we had in mind," Philcox said. "The federal government has to be more involved in this. I want this canker stopped."

Also dissatisfied were 10 representatives of Miami-Dade's \$266 million nursery industry with a grievance over federal assistance granted to some growers -- but not them -- in the wake of Irene.

Gathering near Philcox's grove, they carried signs: "Sec. Glickman, Please Just Give Us Five Minutes" and "Agriculture Means Nurseries Too."

Glickman waved at them as his car entered the area, but the motorcade left by a different route, apparently to avoid further contact.

"Once again, he discriminated against us," Sharon Blue said.

COLLECTIVE BURDEN

Aides said Glickman needed to move along on what they called his "Alien Invaders" tour, a trip to Florida, New York and California to highlight the nation's intensifying problem with imported pests and diseases.

"We want this to be a team, a turf-less team, that deals with this issue," Glickman said. "It's a killer of a problem."

Standing at his side, Crawford escalated the war against canker by saying that the state soon would require anyone working in any Florida citrus grove to disinfect equipment before leaving that grove.

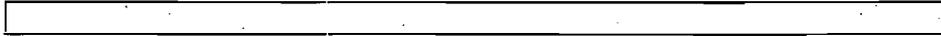
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"If we work together, we can get the job done," Crawford said.

He also said growers might be allowed to replant citrus one year after eradication instead of the currently mandated two years.

Meanwhile, Glickman said federal scientists would fortify their efforts to find a biological or chemical cure.

"We have to figure out a way to deal with this problem so you don't have to extract the tree," he said. "Right now, from the grower's perspective, we're pulling teeth out without Novacaine."



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753

Citrus Canker, 0364

Cabinet secretary tours a sour harvest diseased lime trees

HOMESTEAD, Fla. (AP) Visiting a bulldozed lime grove, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman got a firsthand look at the lethal effect of a nasty little import: the canker.

Glickman declared four devastated south Florida counties agricultural disaster areas on Wednesday, allowing farmers to apply for emergency, low-cost loans.

"This is a monumental problem," Glickman said after watching farmers set fire to an infected lime tree. "The issue is non-native, invasive species, and whether we have the resources to deal with this problem."

Glickman, who is touring the country to inspect problems caused by foreign pests, was scheduled to tour an inspection facility south of San Diego today. He plans to visit the Port of Long Beach, Calif., the nation's busiest cargo container port, on Friday.

South Florida's \$20 million lime industry has already lost more than half of its crop to the canker, which entered the United States from an unidentified foreign country.

The state has waged a constant fight with different strains of the canker for decades. This particular strain was discovered near Miami's airport in 1995, and spread quickly after Hurricane Irene last fall.

The canker has thus far affected mainly lime trees, although officials fear it could affect Florida's northern citrus crops, an \$8 billion industry of mainly oranges and grapefruit.

In hopes of containing the disease, officials have already burned at least 500,000 trees in citrus groves and back yards in a 10-mile swath from Homestead to Boca Raton, and expect to destroy another 500,000.

The price tag of the eradication was estimated at \$175 million.

"Our nightmare is that they that miss one tree, and after another tropical storm or hurricane it starts all over again," Homestead farmer Mark Philcox told Glickman.

On the Net: USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
Site: www.aphis.usda.gov

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(CAT:Agriculture;)
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Citrus Canker, 0565

After Florida, Glickman heads to the other coast

HOMESTEAD, Fla. (AP) After a firsthand look at the lethal damage citrus canker does to South Florida fruit trees, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman now heads to California to learn how officials keep plant pests from crossing the Mexican border.

Glickman is on a four-day tour of the country to survey the destruction caused by unwanted imports: from the Asia-A canker in Florida to the West Nile virus in New York, these alien pests wreak havoc on U.S. vegetation.

While visiting a bulldozed lime grove Wednesday, Glickman declared four South Florida counties an agricultural disaster area, allowing farmers there to apply for emergency, low-cost loans. The area's \$20 million lime industry has already lost more than half of its crop to the canker, which entered the U.S. from an unidentified foreign country.

This is a monumental problem," Glickman said, after watching farmers set fire to an infected tree. It's the only known way to eradicate the virus. The issue is nonnative, invasive species, and whether we have the resources to deal with this problem."

In Florida, the state has waged a constant fight with different strains of the canker for decades. This particular strain was discovered near the airport in 1995, and spread quickly after Hurricane Irene last fall.

It has thus far affected mainly lime trees, although officials fear it could affect Florida's northern citrus crops, an \$8 billion industry of mainly oranges and grapefruit.

In hopes of containing the disease, officials have already burned at least 500,000 trees in citrus groves and backyards in a 20-mile swath from Homestead to Boca Raton, and expect to destroy another 500,000.

The price tag of the eradication is estimated at \$175 million.

While all identified infected areas are under quarantine--Glickman and all others visiting the disease-ridden grove Wednesday were sprayed with a disinfectant before leaving--the canker is difficult to contain.

It has already been found as far north as Tampa, although there is a ban on any citrus fruit leaving a contaminated area.

Infected or exposed areas cannot be replanted with citrus for at least two years.

"Our nightmare is that they that miss one tree, and after another tropical storm or hurricane it starts all over again," Homestead farmer Mark Philcox told Glickman. Philcox said he considers himself lucky to have only lost a third of his lime crop to the disease.

While Glickman said the most important thing is to stop the disease, the USDA is also focusing on fighting nonnative species at its source various air and sea ports across the nation.

Glickman also visited Miami's International Airport, which he said was the largest air cargo facility in the country.

Today, he is scheduled to tour an inspection facility south of San Diego on the Mexican border, and Friday he visits the Port of Long Beach, the nation's busiest cargo container port.

On the Net: USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service site: www.aphis.usda.gov

To obtain information on applying for loans, go to: www.fsa.usda.gov/pas/disaster/assistancel.htm

PROFILE
(CAT:Agriculture;)

118

...nder disaster hits limes, other So. Florida citrus

By Jim Loney

HOMESTEAD, Fla., March 22 (Reuters) - The diesel roar of front-end loaders and the smell of smoke hung over the normally peaceful lime groves of south Florida on Wednesday, the front line of a fight to save Florida's \$8.5 billion citrus industry.

Florida's citrus industry, the state's second-largest money earner behind tourism, is in peril, officials say. Canker is laying waste to acres of lime, pomelo and other citrus in one of the nation's prime lime-growing regions south of Miami.

The canker currently threatens only the southern Florida lime-growing region and agriculture officials hope to contain it before it reaches the critical orange and grapefruit groves of central Florida.

Federal and state officials have agreed on a \$175 million plan -- about half of which has been funded -- to halt the canker, U.S. Rep. Allen Boyd, a north Florida Democrat, said.

"The plan is to draw a circle around the infected area and destroy those trees," Boyd said. "If it spreads into the citrus area north of here, it's disaster for the citrus industry in Florida."

About 800 square miles (2,072 sq km) of Miami-Dade and Broward counties in southern Florida are under quarantine, preventing the transport of fruit, trees or plant material out of affected areas to halt the spread of the disease.

On a 10-acre (4-hectare) tract on the edge of the south Florida farming community of Homestead, growers expected to reap 6,000 bushels of Persians limes this year. Instead, men and machines ripped lime trees from the ground, roots and all, and pushed them into a giant pile and set them afire.

Citrus canker, a bacterial scourge that weakens and ultimately destroys citrus trees and has no cure, is ravaging south Florida groves and threatening tens of thousands of beloved backyard fruit trees.

"Don't make anybody feel good. This is all you can do is wash it out of the ground, kill it before a big rainstorm comes and takes it somewhere else," Bart Harden, vice-president of J & H Land Clearing, said as he watched his crews shove withered lime trees into 20-foot-high (6-metre) mounds.

U.S. Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman, during a tour of Homestead groves on Wednesday, declared disaster areas in four counties, Miami-Dade, Broward, Collier and Monroe, making farmers eligible for low-interest loans.

"It's devastating to these growers. Many of them are totally wiped out," Glickman said. "In order to eradicate canker, we have to take some very, very severe action to get rid of the trees."

A bacterial infection first spotted in Florida 90 years ago, citrus canker is harmless to humans but disfigures citrus fruit and weakens trees, causing them to drop their crop prematurely and leaving them susceptible to other diseases.

The disease is spread by wind, rain and humans. It has no cure and the only way to stop it is to cut down or uproot the trees and burn them.

"It's crushing. It's been like a shock," said Mary Philcox, owner of Grove Services, a manager of groves in south Florida, including the one being burned on Wednesday. "These trees were just starting to reach their peak years."

Many of south Florida's groves were just starting to yield full production following the devastating passage of Hurricane Andrew in 1992, when millions of trees were destroyed.

Lime groves bulldozed to eradicate canker cannot be planted

119

P. 192

again with citrus for two years to ensure the bacteria is gone from the soil. Newly planted trees will not produce fruit for another three years and do not reach their peak production until age seven.

Philcox said the grove land burned on Wednesday might be replanted with a tropical fruit, perhaps avocado. But it was perfect for limes.

"The land is a little low. During the big storms it floods. Avocados don't like to get their feet wet," she said.

The latest outbreak of canker in greater Miami, first discovered in 1995 near Miami International Airport, has already claimed half a million trees.

The pain is acute for both growers and homeowners. Cutting crews are sweeping entire neighborhoods, hacking down beloved backyard trees infected with canker, as well as any apparently healthy tree within 1,900 feet (579 metres) that might have been contaminated.

In the groves, Bart Harden and his crews decontaminate their equipment and themselves after every burn, spraying down machines, car tires and even the soles of their shoes with an antibacterial soap to ensure they do not track the canker to other groves.

They have already destroyed 500 acres (200 hectares) of trees and have another 500 to go:

"It's hard. Me and my dad have been here for years and we know all these growers," he said. "But this is the only way we know to get rid of it."

REUTERS

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Agricultural disaster area declared in lime-growing region 31

HOMESTEAD, Fla. (AP) U.S. Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman declared an agricultural disaster area Wednesday in four Florida counties where an incurable citrus disease is ravaging groves that once provided nearly all of the nation's limes.

This loss is just as devastating as a drought," Glickman said at a grove that was bulldozed because it was infected with citrus canker.

South Florida lime growers have lost more than half of their \$20 million-a-year crop, and officials fear the citrus canker could threaten more of the state's \$8 billion citrus industry if it spreads north into Florida's orange, grapefruit and other citrus groves.

The disaster declaration makes growers eligible for government aid.

Florida has been fighting different strains of the imported disease for decades, and the only way officials have found to destroy it is to knock down infected trees and burn them. Citrus canker causes lesions on the leaves and fruit, drastically reducing the trees' output.

Since the latest outbreak was discovered after Hurricane Irene swamped South Florida last fall, officials have burned at least 500,000 trees in citrus groves and yards in a 70-mile swath from Homestead to Boca Raton, and they expect to destroy another 500,000.

The eradication effort is expected to cost the state \$175 million.

The state recently fought canker infestations near Tampa and in southwestern Florida, and had hoped to have the disease contained. Then inspectors found the new outbreaks.

The owner of the grove Glickman visited, Mark Philcox, considers himself one of the lucky ones: He lost only a third of his crop to the disease.

Philcox and other growers, particularly those still paying off federal loans after Hurricane Andrew devastated the Homestead area in 1992, said they will need more than the usual federal disaster-area loans to recover.

"Our nightmare is that they miss one tree, and after another tropical storm or hurricane it starts all over again," Philcox said.

Glickman told the growers the USDA is working on providing compensation, and more money could come from the Commodity Credit Corp., a revolving fund for agricultural emergencies. Rep. Allen Boyd, a Florida Democrat, is sponsoring a bill that would provide \$40 million to growers who have lost trees in the eradication effort.

The USDA also is stepping up enforcement of import laws and inspections and is trying to find ways to kill the canker without destroying the trees, Glickman said. Officials have yet to pinpoint the country where the latest outbreak came from.

A quarantine barring citrus shipments is in effect for much of the area, and the growers whose groves are infected must wait at least two years to replant citrus trees, which take up to five years to bear fruit. Many growers said they plan to grow avocados in the interim.

On the Net:

USDA disaster assistance:

<http://www.fsa.usda.gov/pas/disaster/assistancel.htm>

120

BN 12:38 Four Florida Counties Declared Disaster Area for Citrus Canker

Four Florida Counties Declared Disaster Area for Citrus Canker

Homestead, Florida, March 22 (Bloomberg) -- U.S. Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman declared four southern Florida counties a disaster area because of an outbreak of citrus canker that could threaten the state's \$8.5 billion citrus industry, though so far it has hit mainly lime trees.

The declaration qualifies growers in Dade, Broward, Collier and Monroe counties for low-interest government loans as the bacterial disease spreads among commercial lime groves in southern Florida. About 500,000 trees have been destroyed so far.

"We know that over 1,000 acres of the approximately 1,600 acres surveyed tested positive" in Miami's Dade County, said Florida Governor Jeb Bush, a Republican, in a letter to Glickman requesting the declaration.

There's no immediate threat to this year's Florida orange crop, now estimated at 219 million boxes, the third-largest ever, because 80 percent to 90 percent of it is harvested, a broker said. The Florida orange crop, the nation's largest, was valued at \$1.3 billion in 1999, according to the U.S. Agriculture Department.

"It's psychologically bullish for down the road; I don't think it's a cause for orange juice prices to go up or down right now," said James Cordier, a broker at Liberty Trading Group in St. Petersburg, Florida.

Orange juice for May delivery rose as much as 0.15 cent, or 0.2 percent, to 84 cents a pound on the New York Cotton Exchange. Prices are up 3.2 percent from a year ago.

Commercial losses due to canker are estimated at \$55 million to \$60 million, most of them in lime groves, said Wendy Borland, spokeswoman for the 12,000-member Florida Citrus Mutual, the state's biggest growers' association. The highly contagious disease, which can be spread by wind and rain, weakens trees and leaves them unproductive. Trees must be destroyed to prevent the spread of the bacteria.

"The canker could definitely have an effect on next year's orange crop," said Rory Dubin, general manager of OJ Investments, which owns 1,300 acres of orange groves at Arcadia, in south-central Florida.

"There's a suspicion canker may be widespread, and I think you'll see prices start to get stronger into next year," Dubin said.

Glickman announced the disaster aid while inspecting an infected lime grove in Homestead, Florida.

--Roger Runningen in Washington. (202) 624-1857/jc

Story illustration: To track orange juice prices during the past year, see (JOL <Cmnty> GP D <GO>).

USDA warns travelers about bringing in farm produce

By Randy Fabi

WASHINGTON, March 24 (Reuters) - With the summer travel season just around the corner, the U.S. Agriculture Department said on Friday it was doing all it could to prevent travelers bringing invasive pests into the United States, which it said could seriously harm the nation's farm economy.

Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman spoke to reporters on the significance of this problem and the need to inform U.S. citizens on what they can and cannot bring into the country.

"This is really a monumental problem for our country," Glickman told reporters in a conference call. "One item carelessly discarded can wreak havoc on American agriculture."

A single link of sausage contaminated with a virus that causes foot-and-mouth disease could destroy the U.S. livestock industry, costing farmers and consumers billions of dollars in lost output and higher food prices, Glickman said.

Most of the contaminated goods are brought into the United States by international travelers, their pets and packaged goods mailed from overseas.

In 1998, USDA inspectors -- with beagles dressed in bright green jackets -- helped sniff out over two million items of agricultural products brought illegally into the United States. Of those confiscated, 57,000 were identified as carrying diseases which could infect American livestock and poultry.

A person found to be bringing agricultural products illegally into the United States could be fined up to \$1,000.

The most dreaded pests the USDA is watching out for include the golden nematode, a microscopic eelworm that could wreak havoc on an entire country's potato crop, and the African swine fever, found in infected meat and which could cause a serious epidemic among hogs.

This week, Glickman declared some Florida counties disaster areas as the spread of canker destroys the state's citrus industry. The \$8.5 million industry is Florida's second-largest money earner after tourism.

Citrus canker, a bacterial scourge that weakens and ultimately destroys citrus trees and for which there is no cure, could have been transported into the United States by an international traveler, Glickman said.

REUTERS

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112

The Miami Herald

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THURSDAY, MARCH 23, 2000 ▶ FINAL EDITION

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'This is the farmer's worst nightmare
S. Florida
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canker

(Front page)

p1566

BY MARTIN MERZER

mmerzer@herald.com

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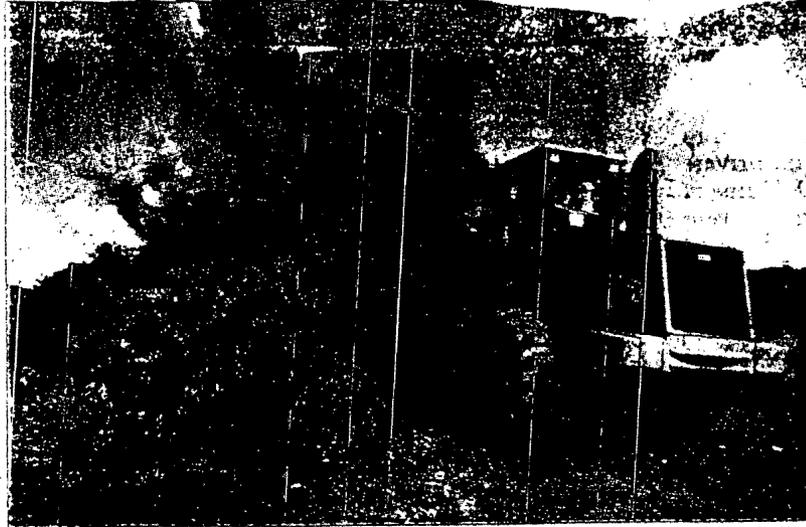
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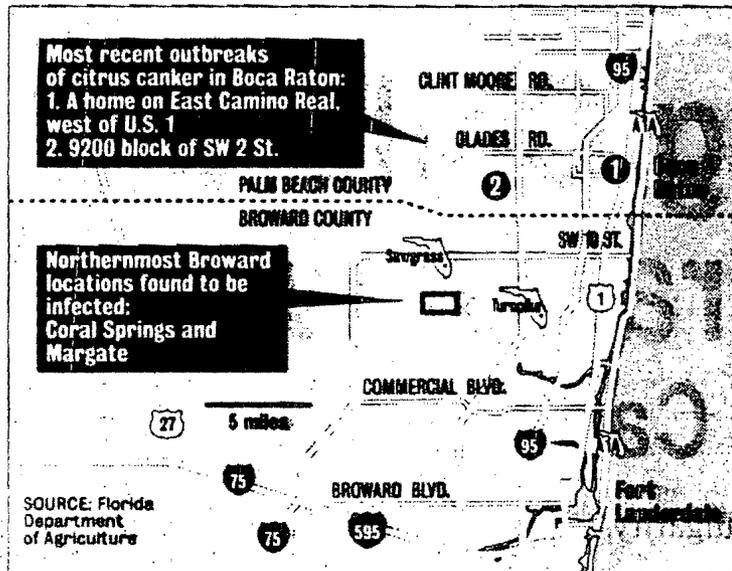
PHOTOS BY TIM CHAPMAN/HERALD STAFF

FIGHT ESCALATES: U.S. Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman, above, gets his feet sprayed with disinfectant as he tours canker-infested fields in south Miami-Dade. In the same area, below, ash and smoke billow from a burning pile of lime trees in a grove at Southwest 312th Street and 207th Avenue.



RECENT CANKER OUTBREAK

Citrus canker has been found this month in at least two locations in southern Palm Beach County. The map also shows the northernmost of many outbreaks in Broward County.



MAA032300

JERE WARREN, HERALD STAFF

p. 3 of 6

▷ CANKER, FROM 1A

lime trees. Crackling flames and black smoke rose from a bonfire of toppled trees. White ashes floated from the sky.

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In addition, a quarantine on the movement of residential citrus covers nearly all of Broward and Miami-Dade.

Though somewhat heartened by Glickman's visit, growers called the availability of low-interest loans insufficient.

REGION UNDER QUARANTINE

A citrus quarantine now covers virtually all of Broward and Miami-Dade counties.

It affects the entire region from the Sawgrass Expressway in north Broward to Southwest 184th Street in south Miami-Dade. Another quarantine area soon will be drawn around a newly infected area south of Southwest 280th Street.

To avoid spreading canker disease, residents in the quarantine zone must not move citrus off their properties and must not come into contact with citrus trees or locally grown fruit. Lawn or landscaping workers in the area must disinfect their equipment when moving between properties.

Fruit from commercial growers in the zone must be carefully inspected and washed.

P 4566

They told Glickman and Crawford that they deserve federal grants because lax enforcement by U.S. inspectors allowed the disease to enter the area, probably through imports arriving at Miami International Airport.

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Grants and low-cost loans might help lime growers plant other crops, but the overall outlook for agriculture in South Florida will remain grim.

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COLLECTIVE BURDEN

Aides said Glickman needed to move along on what they called his "Alien Invaders" tour, a trip to Florida, New York and California to highlight the nation's intensifying problem with imported pests and diseases.

"We want this to be a team, a turf-less team, that deals with this issue," Glickman said. "It's a killer of a problem."

Standing at his side, Crawford escalated the war against canker by saying that the state soon would require anyone working in any Florida citrus grove to disinfect equipment before leaving that grove.

"If we work together, we can get the job done," Crawford said.

He also said growers might be allowed to replant citrus one year after eradication instead of the currently mandated two years.

Meanwhile, Glickman said federal scientists would fortify their efforts to find a biological or chemical cure.

"We have to figure out a way to deal with this problem so you don't have to extract the tree," he said. "Right now, from the grower's perspective, we're pulling teeth out without Novacaine."

P 5016

Lawmaker calls for better reparations for homeowners

BY BETH REINHARD

breinhard@herald.com

Bruce Van Der Meulen of Margate estimates that the 21 rare citrus trees in his backyard, some of which rise 12 feet tall, are worth as much as \$2,000.

But the state will give him only \$100 if his trees are cut down to prevent the citrus canker disease from spreading to valuable groves in central Florida.

"I'm sitting here with terror in my eyes, waiting for the ax to fall," said Van Der Meulen, an avid horticulturist whose backyard is adorned with thousands of tropical plants. "\$100 would be pathetic."

Democratic state Rep. Ron Greenstein, whose district includes Margate and Coconut Creek, is urging state officials to come up with better reparations for homeowners like Van Der Meulen. The state's offer of \$100 applies to owners of

one lost tree or a dozen.

Greenstein met Tuesday with Gov. Jeb Bush and Agriculture Commissioner Bob Crawford to propose that the state identify publicly or privately owned nurseries that will donate trees to residents.

"A voucher is not good enough for some homeowners," Greenstein said.

Looking at a map with red stickers identifying diseased trees, Greenstein said as many as 1,000 could be felled in his North Broward district. State officials have identified only a handful of infected trees, but trees within 1,900 feet are slated to be cut down to stop the disease from spreading.

Staff in the offices of the governor and agriculture commissioner, who have declared a state of emergency over citrus canker, said they would consider Greenstein's proposal.

26576

Fact:

Your second cousin's nephew has a home page

NEWS*Posted at 4:39 p.m. EST Wednesday, March 22, 2000*

Glickman declares citrus-canker disaster area

By NIALA BOODHOO
Associated Press Writer

HOMESTEAD, Fla. -- (AP) -- Visiting bulldozed groves in an area that once provided nearly all the nation's lime crop, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman warned Wednesday of the danger Florida's multibillion dollar citrus industry faces from an imported, incurable plant disease.

Glickman also declared four South Florida counties an agricultural disaster area because of the disease, citrus canker, which can be stopped only by knocking the trees down and burning them.

"This loss is just as devastating as a drought," Glickman said at a lime grove infected with canker.

The state's \$8 billion citrus industry recently fought canker infestations in the Tampa area and in southwest Florida, and had hoped to have it contained. But inspectors then found several new outbreaks in a 70-mile swath from Homestead, southwest of Miami, to Boca Raton, near West Palm Beach.

South Florida lime growers say they have already lost more than half of the fruit of their \$20 million-a-year industry. Wednesday, local growers told Glickman that disaster-area loans won't be enough.

"I've got low-cost loans from Hurricane Andrew, I don't need more loans," said grower Mark Philcox. He said he considers himself lucky that he has lost only a third of his crop to the disease.

Glickman, who visited Philcox's grove as part of a nationwide tour emphasizing the dangers of exotic pests, said the USDA is also working on providing compensation to growers. He said there is a possibility of getting money from the Commodity Credit Corp., a revolving fund for agricultural emergencies.

U.S. Congressman Allen Boyd, D-Fla., who was with Glickman, is sponsoring a bill that would provide \$40 million to growers who have lost trees in the eradication effort.

Trees infected with the canker show lesions on its leaves, fruit and stems. Burning the trees, even those exposed but not yet infected, is believed to be the only way to prevent its spread. Growers are not allowed to replant citrus trees, which take up to five years to bear fruit, for at least two years.

Meanwhile, a quarantine is in effect for the South Florida area, blocking shipments of fruit.

Glickman emphasized Wednesday that the USDA is working on broader issues to solve the problem, including cracking down on enforcement and research into killing the canker without destroying the tree.

"The issue here is nonnative invasive species, whether they be this canker or the Asian long-horn beetle," Glickman said. "It's not just here, it's all over the country."

The South Florida strain of canker began spreading after Hurricane Irene hit South Florida in October last year.

The state has already cut down and burned at least 500,000 trees, most of them in Homestead-area groves but including those taken from residential yards in the Miami-Fort Lauderdale areas.

Another 500,000 trees are expected to be cut down.

It will cost Florida an estimated \$175 million to eradicate the canker.

Commercially, the current outbreak has mostly affected the lime industry in the Homestead area, but there is fear in the citrus industry that it will spread upstate and destroy vast groves of orange, grapefruit and other citrus.

State Agricultural Commissioner Bob Crawford, with Glickman Wednesday, said the state is expecting to contribute around \$65 million and he is working with the USDA to match that figure.

"Without the federal government, we couldn't get this done," he said.

On the Net:

To obtain information on applying for loans, go to:
www.fsa.usda.gov/pas/disaster/assistance1.htm

Fact: Your second cousin's nephew has a home page.

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Washington Post

3/30/2000

WASHINGTON
IN BRIEF

**Glickman Seeks Review
Of 'Terminator' Seeds**

Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman ~~has~~ ~~asked~~ an advisory committee to review ~~the~~ controversial "terminator" technology developed by department scientists to render seeds sterile.

The process, which prevents farmers from reproducing genetically engineered seeds, is designed to help seed companies protect their investment in biotech crops. Critics say it will allow the companies to gain control over farmers, who often save seed from year to year to cut costs.

The Agriculture Department has defended the terminator technology and refused to give up its patent on the process. But Glickman said the technology shows how science "can strike a discordant note with some communities—and perhaps the public at large."

115

Glickman asks panel to review 'terminator' seeds

WASHINGTON (AP) — Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman is seeking outside advice on what to do with "terminator" technology that was developed by his department's scientists to prevent farmers from reproducing genetically engineered seeds.

The terminator project shows how science "can strike a discordant note with some communities and perhaps the public at large," Glickman said in asking an advisory committee Wednesday to review the technology.

USDA officials vigorously defend the technology, which is intended to help seed companies protect their investment in new biotech crops. It hasn't been put into use yet, but biotech opponents worldwide have made it a symbol of what they see are the evils of genetic engineering. USDA has refused to relinquish its patent on the process, which renders seeds sterile.

The 38-member panel, which includes farmers, scientists, consumer advocates and seed company executives, is starting a two-year review of USDA's role in developing and regulating biotech crops. Among the issues he wants the committee to focus on is how to preserve the intellectual property rights of seed developers while protecting the interests of farmers.

Glickman said he appointed the committee "to encourage the kind of civil and thoughtful discussion that the complexity of these issues demand a break from the shrill debate, where nobody listens to anybody."

Biotech companies, which have genetically manipulated plants to make fruits and vegetables more attractive and to render crops resistant to insects, disease and weedkillers, now control the spread of the technology by patenting the seeds and then leasing them to growers, rather than selling them.

USDA researchers say the terminator process is misunderstood and has applications that could benefit farmers around the world. The same technique that renders seeds sterile by turning certain genetic traits on and off also could be used to make plants resistant to drought or pests.

The terminator nickname is a reference to the on-screen robotic killer played by Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Members of the advisory committee are so sharply divided about biotechnology that the Agriculture Department has hired professional facilitators to run the meetings.

In introductory remarks Wednesday, committee members disagreed over whether the government should do more to promote biotechnology or restrict its growth and use.

"What we need to do is educate the public" about the benefits of biotechnology, said Cal McCastlain, a farmer and lawyer in Arkansas. "Going deep into a life form is no different than going deep into space or deep into the ocean."

But Michael Hansen of the Consumer Policy Institute said federal regulatory process is inadequate.

Jeffrey Burkhardt, an expert in agricultural ethics at the University of Florida, said the committee needed to consider the ethical implications of manipulating genes. "We need to spend some time talking about our ethical responsibilities as well as keeping markets open," he said.

On the Net: [USDA biotechnology site:
://www.aphis.usda.gov/biotechnology/](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/biotechnology/)

PROFILE

(CAT:Agriculture;)

(CAT:Education;)

116

Non-native pests threaten U.S. farms

The Agriculture Department tries to hold the line at the border against dangerous insects and plants

BY BEN FOX
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SAN DIEGO — Calling it an issue of national security, Agricultural Secretary Daniel Glickman said last week that the United States must do more to protect its borders from non-native insects and plants that can devastate American farms.

"The resources are significantly inadequate to deal with the problem," Glickman said during a tour Thursday of a bustling commercial crossing on the U.S.-Mexico border.

The Clinton administration has proposed a 20 percent increase in the Agriculture Department's budget this year, but more inspectors and equipment will be needed as international commerce, and the threat from foreign pests, continues to grow, Glickman said.

Glickman was on a national tour last week to call attention to the issue. He stopped at a park in New York City, where Asian long-horned beetles are destroying trees, and in Miami, where a citrus canker outbreak has caused major crop damage.

After touring the Otay Mesa border crossing in San Diego, he met with fruit growers in Fallbrook, where a Mexican fruit fly infestation has prompted agricultural authorities to impose a quarantine on more than 72 square miles of an



FRED GREAVES/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman (right) listens to agriculture officer Sam Longanecker describe procedures at Otay Mesa border crossing and agricultural inspection station in California.

area known as the avocado capital of the United States.

The quarantine is expected to be lifted in June, but San Diego County agricultural officials estimate that it has cost growers \$3 million in lost sales.

"We have to look at this in the context of national security," Glickman told reporters at a news conference at Otay Mesa. "This is important to American economic se-

curity."

The total cost of damage from non-native species and the efforts to combat them run into the hundreds of billions of dollars, he said.

Otay Mesa is the second busiest border crossing in the nation for fresh produce, after Nogales, Ariz., according to the Department of Agriculture.

In the 12 months ending Sept. 30, nearly 43,000 trucks carrying

agricultural products, out of a total of nearly 638,000 trucks, passed northbound through Otay Mesa. But the crossing has just three agricultural inspectors, one supervisor and a technician to enter data.

That's an increase from six months ago, when Otay Mesa had two inspectors, a supervisor who stopped in sporadically and no technician, said Hector Baez, the port director.

Sunday Oregonian
March 26 1990

L.A. Times 4/2/00

P.M. 5

137

End the Biotech Food Fight

■ **Agriculture:** Let all components of the genetically modified food debate be heard.

By DAN GLICKMAN

Opponents of biotechnology have raised some legitimate concerns. In doing so, however, they have often employed guerrilla tactics and outlandish rhetoric. Instead of educating people, they have merely exploited the public's limited knowledge about genetically modified organisms, or GMOs.

Some biotech foes have vandalized fields of genetically modified crops, destroying test plots, while they criticize industry for insufficient field testing. Anti-biotech groups also have demonized those who do not share their point of view, referring to the Monsanto Co. as "Monsatan." A full-page ad in national newspapers accused the biotech industry of wanting to "capture the evolutionary process and . . . reshape life on Earth to suit its balance sheets."

The biotechnology industry and its proponents have done their share of name-calling as well, throwing around terms like "Luddites" and "food terrorist." In my mind, the biotech industry also has come across as arrogant, dismissing biotech skeptics and assuming that the public would automatically embrace GMO products. Most new GMO products were designed to help farmers use fewer pesticides or generate a higher yield using less land. Of course, I believe we should do whatever we can to help American farmers become more profitable, especially in this sluggish farm economy. But, by steering product development in this direction, the biotech in-

dustry overlooked the ultimate end-users of their products: consumers.

Instead of carefully reading the marketplace, the biotech industry has been captive instead to a kind of tone-deaf technophilia. It often seems as if far more thought was given to laboratory research and what is possible than to market research and what is actually desirable. What good is technology if people think it's dangerous and choose not to accept it? New products are only useful—and their benefits fully realized—when they are embraced in the marketplace by consumers.

The biotech industry, so far, has given

'As the two sides become increasingly estranged from each other, the loser is the American consumer.'

most consumers few compelling reasons to accept and embrace genetically engineered foods. In the meantime, opponents were happy to fill the information void and set the tone of the debate, defining these technologies in the most starkly negative, and often exaggerated, terms.

The complex issues regarding genetically modified foods deserve a thorough and thoughtful public dialogue. Instead, what we have is a shrill debate. As the two sides become increasingly estranged from each other, the loser is the American consumer, who cannot make an informed judgment about biotechnology amid the cacophony of aggressive spin.

The federal government regulates bio-

tech products, protecting public health and environmental safety. We will continue to fulfill this essential role. In addition, our neutral function uniquely qualifies us to lead the way in the effort to make room for a sensible center in America's biotechnology debate. Government can and should promote public insight into biotechnology issues as well as carry out the oversight responsibility that is its mandate. We must work to create forums for responsible, civil discourse on the important and complex questions regarding biotechnology.

The Food and Drug Administration held a series of helpful public meetings across the country last year to provide all those interested in biotechnology issues the opportunity to publicly air their views. While this was a positive step, I believe that we must go even further to stimulate an open and balanced public discussion. In January, I created the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Biotechnology Advisory Committee—a panel unique in its broad diversity of opinion and expertise. Its members include farmers, industry representatives, consumer advocates, environmental activists and even an ethicist. I hope the group's public meetings will be a model for the kind of discussion about biotechnology that needs to take place on farms, in research facilities, corporate offices, town halls, coffee shops and living rooms all across this country. It is time for American consumers to join in the effort to start a real conversation about biotechnology. It is time for all the parties in this debate to talk to each other rather than at each other. It is time for the food fight to end.

Dan Glickman is the U.S. secretary of Agriculture.

Biotech food fight hurts U.S. consumers-Glickman

WASHINGTON, April 3 (Reuters) - Resorting to "guerrilla tactics and outlandish rhetoric", biotechnology opponents have exploited the public's limited knowledge about genetically modified organisms or GMOs, U.S. Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman said.

In an opinion piece, published by The Los Angeles Times on Monday, Glickman said American consumers are the real losers as both sides of the biotech debate become increasingly heated.

"As the two sides become increasingly estranged from each other, the loser is the American consumer, who cannot make an informed judgment about biotechnology amid the cacophony of aggressive spin," he said.

Glickman also blamed the biotech industry for the public's ignorance, describing them as a "arrogant."

"Instead of carefully reading the marketplace, the biotech industry has been captive instead to a kind of tone-deaf technophilia," he said.

Glickman said he hopes the USDA's biotechnology advisory committee, which he created, will offer a model for the type of discussion that needs to take place.

The committee's members include farmers, industry representatives, consumer advocates and environmental activists.

((Randy Fabi, Washington Commodities Desk, 202 898-8394))

REUTERS

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120

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 22, 2000

U.S. farm chief to stop at Fallbrook

HARRY BROOKS
STAFF WRITER

FALLBROOK — The nation's top farm official is scheduled to arrive at 1 p.m. Thursday in Fallbrook to get a personal view of a community in the midst of an agriculture quarantine that will last until at least mid-June.

U.S. Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman will travel to the community after observing border inspections of foodstuffs being shipped into the United States from Mexico on Thursday morning, said Susan McAvoy, a spokeswoman for the federal agency.

The quarantine was declared in October after two fertile crop-threatening Mexican fruit flies were caught near down-

► FARM, A-4

North County Times 3-22

► FARM

Continued from A-1

town. The species is native to central Mexico, and agriculture experts say they are confident the captured flies came across the border in smuggled fruit.

County agriculture officials said Glickman will meet with a panel of growers selected by the county Department of Agriculture, Weights and Measures.

His schedule may include a tour of a grove where fruit is being treated with pesticide spray so it can be marketed during the quarantine, county officials said.

Glickman's travel schedule will include a 2:30 p.m. tour of the Callaway Vineyard & Winery in Temecula to view damage caused by Pierce's disease, a plant virus spread by the glassy-winged sharpshooter, an insect that is ravaging the wine-grape industry in Southwest Riverside County.

His four-day national tour was announced in a press release titled "Glickman to Battle Alien Invaders," meaning crop-threatening pests and diseases that are brought in from foreign countries.

"Ecosystems are being altered and destroyed, crops damaged, forests denuded and animals and even people are in danger of contracting fatal diseases," Glickman said in a prepared statement.

"Our current system (for protecting against the intrusion) has not kept pace with unprecedented growth in trade and travel.

This tour will highlight the intensified stakes in our ongoing fight to protect America's agriculture and natural resources from pests and diseases."

The stakes in the quarantine involve 20 varieties of fruit that have an estimated annual crop value of \$49.3 million. The state ordered a 72-square-mile quarantine on Oct. 28 after a second Mexican fruit fly was captured that month near downtown Fallbrook.

No additional fertile Mexican fruit flies have been caught in an array of traps that are baited with a protein-syrup mix. Glickman probably will witness an air

drop of sterile Mexican fruit flies that have been spread throughout the area to stymie successful breeding by any fertile flies that may be around.

State and federal agencies, however, require that the quarantine must last at least three life cycles of the Mexican fruit fly or about eight months. If an additional fertile Mexican fruit fly is caught, the quarantine is immediately extended for three life cycles of the insect from that point.

McAvoy said Glickman is aware he probably will hear criticism from Fallbrook-area growers about reluctance to grant direct federal aid to offset farmers' crop losses.

California's U.S. senators, Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein, have requested federal compensation for growers' losses, but U.S. Department of Agriculture officials said they have no means to grant such reparations unless the destruction is caused by a natural disaster such as a flood, fire or earthquake.

Glickman's tour started Tuesday in New York City, which has been hit by the West Nile virus and an infestation of the Asian long-horned beetle.

The beetle has destroyed 5,600 trees in the urban settings of New York and Chicago, a USDA news release said, noting that the West Nile virus has killed seven people and nine horses in those cities.

Glickman, 55, who served 18 years as a congressman from Kansas before taking USDA's helm five years ago, also was scheduled to talk about the plight of Pennsylvania farmers who have lost \$5 million worth of orchard crops to plum pox virus.

Today, Glickman will tour citrus groves in Florida where more than \$70 million worth of crops have been lost to citrus canker.

Glickman tours Fallbrook, but offers little help from USDA

The ebb and flow of commodities through California's ports and border crossings means more safes and year-round availability of produce for consumers—but it also brings a surge of damaging pests. Unchecked, these pests threaten to overrun the state and the nation, costing tens of millions of dollars as they spread.

To get a first-hand look at the problems foreign pests create, U.S. Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman recently completed a four-day tour of USDA inspection facilities in Miami, San Diego and Long Beach. He also stopped at Fallbrook in San Diego County to talk to growers hit by a quarantine last fall after two Mexican fruit flies were discovered in the area.

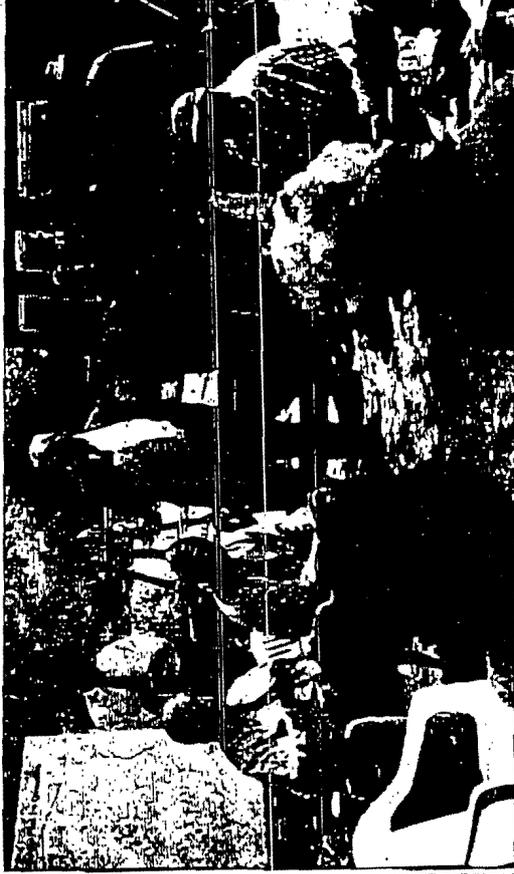
Fallbrook growers told the secretary that the unfortunately timed and poor-

ly orchestrated quarantine has cost them hundreds of thousands of dollars, some having to declare their crops total losses.

Glickman admitted to growers, "this quarantine wasn't perfect," but he said not to expect aid from the USDA, instead referring them to their congressional representatives to work on an appropriation.

During a visit to the USDA inspection point at Otay on California's border with Mexico, Glickman said, "In a global economy, we must fight a global war against invasive pests and diseases. Our current system has not kept pace with the unprecedented growth in trade and travel."

That means troublesome viruses, plants and insects hitchhike into the country in cargo, luggage, even mail.



USDA's Dan Glickman, left, talks with growers in Fallbrook.

California alone is currently battling more than a half dozen foreign invaders including the glassy-winged sharpshooter, Mexican fruit fly and red imported fire ant. Experts estimate that an economically significant pest is entering the state every 60 days.

"Secretary Glickman seemed sin-

cere in his comments that he intended to increase staffing on the border to improve pest exclusion," San Diego County Farm Bureau manager Eric Larson said. Larson and San Diego County Farm Bureau President Al Stehly joined Glickman on his tour of border stations and in Fallbrook.

Just the ticket!
WALKS SAVING

Chicago Sun-Times

113

10 Saturday, April 15, 2000

METRO

USDA testing new pesticide in beetle battle

By BRENDA WARNER ROTZOLL
STAFF REPORTER

Year Three of the battle to eradicate the Asian long-horned beetle in Chicago started Friday when researchers injected the ground around 60 healthy trees with a pesticide that they hope will inoculate trees against beetle eggs and larvae.

Win McLane from the U.S. Department of Agriculture research center in Otis, Mass., who oversees the fight against the tree-chomping pest nationally, manned the hydraulic injector that shot imidacloprid a foot into the ground.

By the end of the day, he had aching muscles. Each inch of tree diameter required a 2-quart shot of imidacloprid in water, so a tree 12 inches thick needed a dozen shots, a 2-foot tree 24 shots. They had to be placed in a circle, 3 feet out from the trunk, so tree roots could pick up the mixture.

Fifteen trees each in four neighborhoods received ground injections Friday. In early May, another 15 trees each in the same neighborhoods will be treated with the same chemical, but it will be applied from corn-cob pipe-size Maugel injectors that drain the insecticide into the tree trunk within four hours.

Scientists need to know how long it takes the insecticide to work up through the tree's circulatory system and how long it remains effective. Local USDA officials will collect twigs in a week and then monthly all season and send them to a Mississippi laboratory.

This scientific study is separate from a major



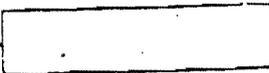
BOB BLACK/SUN-TIMES

Win McLane of the USDA on Friday injects the ground around a healthy tree to try to inoculate it against the Asian long-horned beetle.

eradication effort in which beetle fighters hope to inject imidacloprid into 7,000 Chicago area trees to stop the spread of the beetle by killing its larvae.

Ken Krusa, the state USDA chief, stressed that only the USDA and its contractors can use imidacloprid experimentally against the beetle.

Attn: Phil Shankoltzer



Health and behavior

FDA plans to serve data before biotech food, but critics say labeling is needed

By Anita Manning
USA TODAY

A government strategy to bolster consumer confidence in genetically modified foods will provide information on products before they hit the market. But it stops short of mandating specific tests or labeling of genetically engineered foods.

The plan, out Wednesday, is "a very positive step the administration is taking to enhance openness in regulation of food biotechnol-

ogy," says the Grocery Manufacturers of America's Brian Sansoni. "It also reaffirms that the technology and its products are safe."

Consumer advocates are not so sure. "It's inadequate," says Michael Hansen of Consumers Union. "It's a step forward, but it still does not require labeling."

The plan is a response to growing consumer concern over the safety of crops that are altered genetically to fight off disease and withstand applications of herbi-

cides. Biotech crops account for about half the soybeans produced in the USA and a third of the corn. Critics fear unforeseen effects on health and the environment.

Highlights of the plan, which is to be outlined as a proposed regulation this fall:

► The Food and Drug Administration will develop a proposal to require companies to notify the agency at least 120 days before they introduce genetically altered products into the food supply. Cur-

rently, this is routinely done by biotech firms on a voluntary basis.

► The FDA will make data submitted by the biotech companies, including results of tests on the products and the agency's opinions on the data, available to the public.

► The FDA will develop guidelines for voluntary labeling as to whether food products contain genetically modified organisms.

Joe Mendelson of the Center for Food Safety, an environmental and consumer advocacy group that

petitioned the FDA for stronger regulations, says that although the 120-day notification requirement is welcome, "we don't think consultation or talking with the FDA is (the same as) testing. This leaves to the industry what to test for. That's totally inadequate."

The administration's initiative won't "accomplish the goal of shoring up consumer confidence, either here in the U.S. or abroad," says Margaret Mellon of the Union of Concerned Scientists. "Europe and

Japan are requiring labeling and stronger safety testing. For us to enter the international marketplace with weaker systems than our trading partners doesn't seem a wise move internationally."

But Tim Willard of the National Food Processors Association says the proposal will build consumer confidence: "What has been a voluntary procedure in the past, now is mandatory. It will be a far more transparent process, so those with an interest in this can look at it."

LA Times - C1/C14

P1 Seeks to Boost Oversight of Genetically Modified Foods

■ Biotech: Firms would have to notify the FDA before introducing new gene-altered items. But advocacy groups say it does little for consumers.

By MELINDA FULMER
TIMES STAFF WRITER

The Clinton administration unveiled plans Wednesday to tighten federal oversight of genetically engineered food and provide more detailed information about these products to the public in a move designed to boost consumer confidence in agricultural biotechnology.

Under the new proposal, expected to become final next fall, biotechnology companies would have to notify the Food & Drug Administration four months before introducing a new gene-altered food or animal feed and provide scientific evidence to prove the item's safety. That information could be provided to consumers on the FDA's Web site. Currently, this notification is voluntary, and consumers must submit a written Freedom of Information Act request to access much of the data on biotech crops.

The agency won't require food companies to label food that contains genetically modified organisms, something that consumer groups and some legislators have been pushing for. Because the plan doesn't require additional testing or labeling, consumer and environmental groups say it does little for consumers.

"This plan is like fat-free food," said Dr. Rebecca Goldberg, a senior scientist at Environmental Defense, a nonprofit group. "It's not very good, and there isn't much substance."

The FDA will, however, draft a set of guidelines for food companies that want to label their products as being free of GMOs. Although some natural-foods companies are already putting that claim on their label, the guidelines would make food companies

Please see FOOD, C14

FOOD

Continued from C1

adhere to a universal set of guidelines designed to be "truthful and informative."

"Right now, there are no guidelines for what GMO-free is," says Michael Phillips, director of food and agriculture of the Biotechnology Industry Organization, a Washington trade group. "We need to develop a threshold because you can't have zero-tolerance [for genetically modified ingredients]; it's just not possible."

In addition to the changes proposed by the FDA, the Department of Agriculture will also begin conducting its own research to certify that scientific tests designed to detect the presence of bioengineered ingredients in foods are accurate. And it will begin accrediting laboratories that use these tests.

Since the early 1990s, the FDA has treated genetically engineered crops just like any other foods. As long as the genes transferred produce proteins already in the food supply, the agency does not require pre-market approval or special labeling.

The food industry, which has opposed labeling on the grounds that it would be too expensive and turn off consumers, applauded the plan.

"It enhances the openness and transparency of the regulation of food biotechnology, while at the same time reaffirming that the

technology is safe," says Brian Sansoni, senior manager for public policy at the Grocery Manufacturers of America.

Officials of the group hope to weigh in on the guidelines for GMO-free claims, to make sure they don't imply superiority. They'd like to see the FDA approve labels similar to those used on hormone-free milk, which contain a disclaimer that the hormone has not been demonstrated a risk to human health.

The FDA expects to officially propose the guidelines and begin accepting public comment this fall.

Genetically modified crops, which began hitting the U.S. market in 1995, are designed to resist certain pests and herbicides or to stay fresher longer. More than half of the soybeans planted last year and 30% of the corn were made from biotech seeds, and through oils and sweeteners those products wind up in a huge number of processed products from corn chips to soft drinks.

To date, there is no scientific evidence that genetically modified food poses a threat to human health. However, critics charge that there hasn't been enough research done to say that conclusively. A panel of the National Academy of Sciences recently concluded that although genetically engineered food is basically safe, the potential exists for undesirable effects such as allergic reactions and higher toxicity.

LOS ANGELES TIMES

Because of this potential, governmental agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency have started reviewing their regulatory policies for biotech foods. And the administration is starting its own six-month review of the environmental regulations dealing with genetically altered crops.

"We need better coordination between the three agencies, and we need to make sure they're adequately funded so they can get research done," says Cliff Gabriel, a deputy director of the administration's Office of Science and Technology Policy. "The biotech scene is moving so rapidly we need to make sure the research keeps up with all that."

More U.S. biotech food regulations likely-Glickman

By Julie Vorman

WASHINGTON, May 4 (Reuters) - The Clinton administration's new initiative to step up oversight of gene-spliced foods and publish more scientific data on the Internet is a first step certain to be followed by other regulatory actions, U.S. Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman said on Thursday.

"It is a good first step," Glickman said, referring to the administration's Wednesday announcement of new biofood policies. "I do not think it is the last step."

The White House plan seeks to reassure American consumers that genetically modified foods are safe by requiring developers to meet with Food and Drug Administration regulators who will publish research and safety data on the Internet.

The plan also aims to establish voluntary guidelines for foodmakers who want to label their products as free of genetically modified foods.

Both policy actions will be detailed in proposals to be issued this autumn for public comment.

Environmental and consumer groups criticized the administration announcement on Wednesday as merely a superficial change in policy that fell short of what the government ought to be doing to ensure safety. The groups have generally called for regulators to require strict safety testing, long-term monitoring of health and wildlife effects, and mandatory labels on biofoods so consumers know what they are buying.

Glickman said mandatory labeling of foods containing gene-spliced ingredients was premature.

"We are not in a position to do mandatory labeling right now," Glickman told reporters after addressing a new National Academy of Sciences committee that is analyzing biotech food issues and regulations.

"We wouldn't even know how to go down that road right now even if it were a good idea, and I'm not pre-supposing that it is," he added.

More than a dozen other nations -- including Japan, South Korea and the European Union -- have adopted mandatory labeling of biofoods.

During his speech to the 18-member National Academy of Sciences panel, Glickman said that while genetically modified foods are safe the federal government must respond to "legitimate concerns" about the food.

"The goal has to be to give people the confidence that the system is on the level," Glickman said. "Industry, while an important part of the system, does not run the show."

Biotech issues are a top priority at the USDA, which has appointed its own advisory panel to examine existing regulations and policies.

As part of the administration's initiative, the USDA will help standardize tests developed to detect tiny amounts of genetically altered corn, soybeans and other grains.

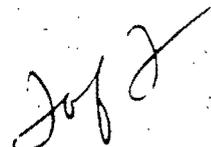
"We have also been approached by some of the entities that are developing identity-preserved mechanisms to validate those processes," said Enrique Figueroa, USDA deputy undersecretary for marketing and regulatory programs.

Some companies such as Cargill Inc. are already using identity preservation to carefully track what variety of grain is planted, and how it is produced, handled and shipped. The method is an alternative to crop segregation, which requires a completely separate -- and more costly -- marketing system to meet European and Asian customers' demands for non-genetically altered grain shipments.

118
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A proposed rule on standardized testing, and possibly the identity preservation of grains, will be published in the Federal Register in the "next three to four months" for suggestions and comments from the public, Figueroa said.

((washington.commodenergy.newsroom@reuters.com))

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REUTERS

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BUSINESS

THE FRESNO BEE • FRIDAY, MAY 26, 2000

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Thursday, sending shares in a sharp decline. Street's largest investment firms sharply lower on fears that the stock market's continuing weakness will hurt their profits.

In futures trading, unleaded gasoline prices rose to nearly a nine-year high on the eve of the U.S. summer driving season, which traditionally begins this weekend. Natural gas futures and crude oil also rose, while gold, corn and soybeans fell.

Gold closed at \$270.50, down \$3, on the New York Mercantile Exchange.

IN THE WORLD

Start-ups delay public offerings

FRANKFURT, Germany — Crashing tech stocks are rattling European investors, pushing some startup companies to delay plans to go public as their own stock markets shrivel up.

Several European high-tech companies postponed plans to sell new shares this week, the latest being Swedish online retailer LetsBuyIt.com, which on Thursday called off its June initial public offering on the German market.

— Bee news services

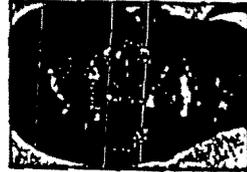
Farmers' disaster bailout awaits Clinton signature

BY MICHAEL DOYLE
BEE WASHINGTON BUREAU

WASHINGTON — An election-year farm package approved Thursday by Congress will mean hundreds of millions of dollars for California farmers and some unexpected help in fighting a dreaded grape vineyard disease.

The big money in the \$15 billion measure approved by the House and Senate is billed as a combination of disaster bailout and crop-insurance reform. By reform, lawmakers mean bigger taxpayer subsidies to promote use of crop insurance.

"We'd like to have more farmers participate in crop insurance, so that Congress wouldn't have the need to respond to natural disasters," said Rep. Cal



Rep. Cal Dooley says he wants more farmers to take out crop insurance, reducing the need for bailouts. The Hanford Democrat serves on the eg committee.

Dooley, a Hanford Democrat who serves on the House Agriculture Committee.

But the legislation heading for President Clinton's signature also includes smaller, targeted amounts like that slipped in on behalf of California's wineries late Wednesday night. The bill directs \$7.14 million to help fight the

Please see FARM, Page C4

Justice Dep to AT&T, N

ASSOCIATED PRES

WASHINGTON — The Justice Department gave conditional Thursday to AT&T Corp.'s offer of MediaOne Group Inc. a deal that would make the long-distant the nation's largest cable company.

AT&T has agreed to speed its Road Runner, the second-largest provider of high-speed Internet, which MediaOne has an interest in. AT&T already has a control interest in the biggest provider of speed Internet access, Excite.

The deal still requires Federal Communications Commission approval, which is expected soon.

The Justice Department is looking at the deal, which would combine both services and would substantially lessen c

solid trade to follow WTO entry

BY JOHN LEICESTER
ASSOCIATED PRESS

BEIJING — U.S. and Chinese businesses looked forward to more stable trade, China's government expressed hope for closer ties with Washington and China's neighbors spoke of better prospects for peace after the U.S. House approved permanent trade ties with Beijing.

Support came from a wide spectrum. China's government called the U.S. House vote "wise."

Shares in companies expected to profit from boosted trade led modest rises on Chinese stock markets. For Chinese and U.S. businesses, the end of annual

divisive congressional debates on China's trade status promised greater stability.

But while welcoming Wednesday's vote, the Beijing leadership assailed a provision in the House legislation to establish a commission to monitor China's human and labor rights. The U.S. Senate still must approve the measure for it to take effect.

China protested to the U.S. government and "we reserve the right to take further actions," Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Zhang Qiyue said.

But despite the anger, Zhang indicated Beijing would honor its agreement with the United States in November to open China's markets.

Noting U.S. concerns about Beijing's trustworthiness, chief Chinese WTO negotiator Long Yongtu also said "China will undoubtedly carry out all its promises made in the WTO negotiations," state media reported.

Beijing's anger over the human rights commission had been expected. For weeks, China had urged Congress to extend unconditional permanent normal trade relations, but U.S. officials said the monitoring commission was necessary to win over wavering legislators to ensure the vote succeeded.

ciation of Realtors said.

An upswing in mortgage rates helped account for the decline,

lieve the Fed will boost interest rates higher in the coming months to slow the economy to a

Farm: Disaster bailout to help state vineyards hit by disease

Continued from Page C1
glassy-winged sharpshooter, a pest that threatens to carry the devastating Pierce's disease through orchards and vineyards.

About 500 acres of Riverside County vineyards already have been lost to the bacteria infestation, which has been detected moving north along with the brown-bodied, half-inch-long, leaf-hopping insect.

"This is an epidemic of unknown proportions," said Rep. Gary Condit, a Ceres Democrat who also serves on the House Agriculture Committee. "We have a real problem on our hands and must make every effort to contain and control migration of this infestation."

The new federal funds are supposed to help the California Department of Food and Agriculture "monitor for the earliest signs of the disease and ... inspect nursery stock prior to shipment."

Unfortunately, lawmakers concede in the legislation, while "this insect is a major problem ... the elimination of the insect would not eliminate the disease."

For this longer-term effort, the House is expected to take up soon a fiscal 2001 agriculture spending bill that includes \$2 million for University of California-based Pierce's disease research, another \$1.1 million for Agricultural Research Service work and additional help through a contingency fund.

The crop insurance and disas-

ter relief measure given final approval faced no such problems.

More than half of the measure, \$8.2 billion, will pay for additional crop insurance subsidies for the next five years. The government already spends roughly \$1 billion a year subsidizing premiums, but many farmers still buy only the lowest amount of coverage.

The government will pick up 59% of the premium for the most common type of crop insurance, up from the current 40% share.

In a change sought by Sunkist and other California co-operatives, the measure also will permit the big co-ops to buy subsidized insurance to make available to farmers.

An additional \$7.1 billion goes for precisely the kind of ad hoc disaster relief that lawmakers say they want to stop providing.

The biggest chunk of this farm aid is not targeted. Instead, Congress has simply doubled the subsidy payments already scheduled for all cotton, rice and grain growers enrolled in the current Freedom to Farm program.

This marks the third straight year that Congress has provided emergency farm relief, with the recent running total now at \$23 billion.

When Congress last touched the crop insurance program, in 1994, the stated intention was also to get out of the business of providing annual farm disaster bills.

ON THE WEB

Go to fresnobee.com for more on the China trade issue.

profit from boosted trade led modest rises on Chinese stock markets. For Chinese and U.S. businesses, the end of annual

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Beagle guards U.S. from bad bugs

By Carter Dougherty
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Getting busted by Ilka M. Matthes and her partner, Comet, at Dulles International Airport does not typically traumatize weary trans-Atlantic fliers. Some of them even find it fun.

Ms. Matthes is a "canine officer" with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's "Beagle Brigade." And Comet is a friendly beagle with a nose for illegal imports of plant and animal products.

Their work begins when the 28-year-old Ms. Matthes leads 2½-year-old Comet to the handbag or suitcase of an incoming passenger in the baggage claim area for international flights. Every so often, Comet sits next to a bag.

It is a "passive response" Comet has been trained to exhibit when his keen senses detect what might be contraband.

"Do you have any fresh fruits or vegetables with you?" Ms. Matthes asks the passenger, who often is more interested in the cute beagle than the uniformed officer.

If the answer is no, she is usually able to establish fairly quickly that the passenger had produce before landing in the United States, and the matter ends there. If the answer is yes, she will record the details on the passenger's customs declaration card. The goods are confiscated when the passenger leaves the customs area, and later incinerated. An attempt to hide products whose import is illegal can result in a \$250 fine.

"It's best just to declare any and all foods you carry in," Ms. Matthes said.

Ms. Matthes is part of the Plant Protection and Quarantine program of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). This division of the agriculture department is responsible for ensuring that potentially destructive pests do not make their way into the United States via unwitting airline passengers.

The 1979 Mediterranean fruit fly infestation in California probably started when an international traveler brought "wormy fruit" into the United States, according to the APHIS Web site. The problem took three years and \$100 million to clean up.

Though Ms. Matthes has other duties, like operating the APHIS X-ray machine and inspecting passengers' luggage, she clearly relishes working with Comet, whom she regards as a trusted partner who happens to be a dog, and whose personality she knows well.



Comet sits to alert Ms. Matthes after detecting the smell of fruit inside the bag of a newly arrived passenger (above). Ms. Matthes congratulates Comet (below) after he detected contraband.



Washington at Work

Washington at Work is a regular feature that focuses on the people behind area businesses and government.

that hides a real jokester," she said. "If he were a human, he'd stick his leg out to trip someone walking down the aisle."

And Ms. Matthes knows her animals.

was 3. I was always the animal collector," she said, "the dogs, the cats, the rabbits, the fish ... you get the idea."

Ms. Matthes came to the job in the summer of 1995. Her mother knew someone in the Dulles office. She graduated from Virginia Tech that same year with minors in animal sciences, biology and chemistry. Because a science background was a requirement for APHIS officers, she was well-suited to a job that is, fundamentally, about catching pests.

After a 13-week training course at John F. Kennedy Airport in New York, she was qualified to work as a canine officer. Now, for over three of her five years with APHIS,

109

100

WORK

From page B9

Ms. Matthes has worn the "K9" insignia on her collar and the "Agriculture Beagle Brigade" patch on her arm.

For Ms. Matthes, a typical day begins around 11:30 a.m., when she picks up Comet at a kennel in Buckystown, Md. Her job is finished when she drops him off at the kennel around 9:30 p.m.

Dulles receives mostly trans-Atlantic flights, so the heavy traffic is in the afternoon and early evening rather than in the morning, when only a few trans-Pacific flights trickle in.

At Dulles, Comet stays in a cage in Ms. Matthes' office when he is not on the floor. Accustomed to the daily grind and well-trained, he does not bark in protest.

On the floor of the baggage

claim area, Ms. Matthes, a petite woman with a friendly visage, ambles about with Comet, occasionally admonishing him to "look professional." Comet, wearing a green jacket identifying him as part of the USDA team, sits quietly and enjoys the attention from Ms. Matthes.

"You're a very good boy, aren't you? Yes, you are!" She scratches his head for a few minutes, pauses and then exclaims: "Let's go!"

By tapping the first few bags, Ms. Matthes gets Comet moving, and he does not require much additional encouragement. Almost neurotically nimble, he scurries between bags on the floor, stopping suddenly, sniffing and moving on to find the goods.

In one incident, Comet sat down firmly next to Brigitte Hauer of Austria and Derya Kocher of Turkey. The two had just arrived on an Austrian Airlines flight from Vienna, and each was munching on an apple, Comet's favorite fruit, ac-

ording to Ms. Matthes.

She asked if they had other fruit, and it turned out they had a few bananas in their carry-on bag. She noted the goods on their customs declaration card. Ms. Hauer, flustered but charmed by Comet, said in heavily accented English that she wanted to eat them in the baggage area. Ms. Matthes gave her the OK, but they needed to save the peels and leave them in the area.

For his role in finding some fruit, Comet got a treat from Ms. Matthes: a small piece of Purina One Beef Jerky Strips.

More passengers take note of Comet than Ms. Matthes.

"Do you see the little dog? They're so cute," one woman said to her friend as Comet worked a line of suitcases.

Over the next hour, Comet would reel in seven other passengers, some of whom had produce with them, and the beagle received at least as many adoring looks from smitten passengers. By con-

trast, dogs used by the U.S. Customs Service to find illegal drugs — much larger breeds like golden retrievers and Labradors — tended to startle passengers as they bounded around the luggage carousels.

Comet has been trained to look mainly for produce and animal products, and he once sniffed out collections of hamsters and parakeets that had been squirreled away in suitcases.

But his sense of smell is not infallible, Ms. Matthes said. Passengers arriving from Guatemala and El Salvador on Taca Air frequently carry lots of fried chicken, which overwhelms Comet's olfactory nerve.

"The dogs go so crazy over the odor that they can't work the flight at all," Ms. Matthes said.

Instead, most Taca passengers have to go through the time-consuming process of having their bags X-rayed, or physically inspected by APHIS officers.

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Brazil gears up for key ruling on GM corn imports

By Jeremy Smith

RIO DE JANEIRO, June 29 (Reuters) - A Brazilian government commission should rule this week on the safety of importing genetically-modified corn, possibly paving the way for a major policy shift on GM foods from South America's farming giant.

The National Biosafety Commission (CTNBio) will end a three-day meeting on Friday, when it will issue its views on the public health impact of animal and human consumption of any of the 13 varieties of GM corn currently on the market.

Brazil outlaws genetically altered crops and is the hemisphere's last major grains competitor to the United States to hold out as an anti-GM bastion -- while neighboring Argentina is already the world's second largest GM producer, particularly of corn and soybeans.

The commission is widely expected to approve imports of GM corn, one of the few agricultural commodities where Brazil's production is insufficient to meet local demand.

CTNBio cautiously recommends a national policy favoring transgenics and authorizes some limited testing of GM crops.

"We will make a detailed analysis of each of the varieties of corn," said CTNBio's president Leila Macedo Oda. "We haven't received notification from any country that there have been problems with the consumption of genetically-modified corn."

"This technology (GM) is irreversible, but there has to be an effective control so that society can live with it without running risks," she told reporters earlier this month.

Despite growing more than 30 million tonnes of its own corn a year, Brazil still imports to meet internal demand. This year, due to a drought over the southern farmlands, demand is expected to exceed supply by at least two million tonnes.

But in recent weeks government authorities, alerted by international environmental group Greenpeace, have turned back at least two cargoes of Argentine corn from Brazilian ports as the grains were found to be genetically modified.

Greenpeace said Thursday its activists would dress as cooks and demonstrate through the afternoon outside the CTNBio meeting to demand "transparency" in the commission's decision.

Although the views of CTNBio will be paramount for Brazil to authorize entry of any GM corn, the final decision will rest with the Agriculture Ministry -- which specifically asked the commission to look at imports from the U.S. and Argentina.

If Brazil does eventually approve GM corn, the next obvious policy step would be to authorize wide-scale planting and, presumably, exports of soybeans. Brazil is the world's second largest soybean producer after the United States.

But analysts took a more skeptical line, stressing that whatever this week's technical decision of the commission turns out to be, the Agriculture Ministry -- where the buck stops -- still appears to be rigid in its anti-GM policy.

"It's politically sensitive but corn and soy are related cases," said Flavio Franca, chief soybean analyst at leading grains consultancy Safras e Mercado. "The government's policy applies to all transgenic products in general."

"If they allow (GM) corn imports, consequently soybeans are included in that process. But it's not them (CTNBio) in charge because it'll then go to the Agriculture Ministry," he said.

Franca pointed to a court decision late Wednesday which upheld a consumer-led injunction slapped on U.S. biotechnology and agribusiness giant Monsanto Co. (MTC.N) in 1999, which bans sales of its GM Roundup Ready soybeans in Brazil.

119

107 2

113

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US: debate over biotech food ignores its humanitarian potential

UNITED NATIONS (AP) The U.S. agriculture secretary urged supporters and detractors of genetically engineered food Monday to focus on the benefits biotechnology can have in feeding the growing world population.

With 800 million people chronically hungry and the world's population expected to hit 9 billion in 50 years, "we have to do something to squeeze higher yields out of fewer and fewer acres," Dan Glickman told a panel discussion of the U.N. Economic and Social Council.

Glickman said biotech foods must be part of the answer, since they can not only increase the quantity but the quality of food.

Genetically engineered crops including corn, cotton and soybeans have become popular in the United States over the past few years because of the increased yields.

But they have met increased consumer resistance in Europe and Asia. Critics of the crops, which are resistant to herbicides or insects, say that there isn't enough known about their impact on health and the environment.

Glickman decried what he called the "loud, contentions, trans-Atlantic food fight" that has ensued, saying both supporters and detractors of biotech had lost sight of its potential to ease hunger in the developing world.

"Many of the opponents, frankly, can afford the luxury of their opposition; they don't have to worry about food insecurity since they live in prosperous, agriculturally abundant societies," he said.

But Glickman also criticized biotech's proponents, the multinational corporations that are developing the products saying their focus on profit was also missing the point.

"If they took the longer view they might see the benefit of focusing on the developing world not just as a gesture of corporate citizenship but because such an investment will ultimately pay dividends as developing countries mature into reliable customers," he said.

In his speech, Glickman also announced a \$145 million new package of farm aid involving 350,000 metric tons of wheat, corn and rice to Afghanistan, Kenya and Horn of African nations hit by drought.

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101

Chicago Tribune 8-2-00 Sec 2 p 3

More funds urged to battle invasive species

By Karen Meilen
TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

With the Asian longhorned beetle breeding in North Side neighborhoods, the gypsy moth pushing into the northern suburbs and the round goby competing for food in Lake Michigan, Chicago has become a center of invasive species wreaking biological havoc.

So it was only logical for the U.S. Department of Agriculture to pick the city for a two-day tour that wrapped up Tuesday to call attention to—and hopefully raise money to stop—the movement of non-native plants and insects.

Actually, pick any region in the country, and that area has experienced some form of infestation from imported plants, insects or animals that compete with the natural species in the habitat. These



Tribune photo by John Smerciak
Richard Rominger, deputy secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

include tropical fruit fly outbreaks in Florida to the West Nile virus in New York, spread by a mosquito, said Richard Rominger, deputy secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

But with global trade doubling over the last 10 years and the number of Americans traveling to other countries also increasing, the number of such invasions has gone up.

Rominger, who organized the trip to Chicago for about a dozen congressional staffers, hopes government staffs from the federal level down to local municipalities will support initiatives to prevent the outbreaks and launch attacks to eradicate the species when they get a stronghold.

At the same time, he admitted it's hard to get people to care about the issue until their prized oak tree in the back yard is stripped bare of leaves from the caterpillar of the

gypsy moth.
"None of these [outbreaks] register with people until they impact them," Rominger said. "But I think it's very important to get more awareness. When we get that awareness, we get help."

One estimate is that Americans spend \$137 billion annually to control invasive species, said Pamela Thiel, project leader for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. In most cases, those infestations are controlled, either by spraying insecticides or pesticides or by introducing a natural enemy of the species.

But a few stubborn cases hold on. In the case of the Asian longhorned beetle, brought to America from China in packing crates, forestry officials expect to eradicate the pest in Chicago, but only after spending \$6.6 million so far and cutting down more than 1,000 trees.

As for the round goby, the bottom dwelling fish is gaining on Illinois waterways and is feared-headed: the Mississippi River via canals and rivers from Lake Michigan. To stop the fish, which competes with other fish for food and spawns at sites, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is building an electrical barrier at the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal in Romeoville.

In the two years the project has been in the works, the fish has spread past where the barrier is installed. Now, officials can only hope the device will slow the spread of the fish, not stop it.

In some cases, the species do cause any real harm but are nuisances for humans. The gypsy moth, for instance, does not directly kill a tree but weakens it by eating all its leaves, leaving the tree susceptible to other diseases.

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BridgeStation

Mon Sep 25 12:53:05 2000

[BKTQWRY] (3) GMOs: Glickman says Kraft's taco shell recall "appropriate". [13]

-- (3) GMOs: Glickman says Kraft's taco shell recall "appropriate" --

By Charles H. Featherstone, BridgeNews

Washington--Sept. 25--Kraft Foods has "acted appropriately" by recalling taco shells that may contain a type of genetically engineered corn not approved for human consumption, USDA Secretary Dan Glickman told reporters Monday.

108

Glickman said that Food and Drug Administration is monitoring the situation and the taco shells--licensed from Taco Bell--need to be removed from the food supply system.

"Kraft has handled it well," Glickman said of the recall.

Last week, consumer and anti-GMO watchdog groups said they discovered small quantities of an allergen-like protein in Taco Bell taco shells. The protein comes from a type of GMO corn only approved for animal feed.

Glickman said that grain segregation methods needed to be tightened to ensure that the unapproved corn doesn't work its way into the human food chain again.

When asked about ongoing negotiations between the administration and Congress over the fiscal 2001 agriculture appropriations bill, Glickman said that USDA was "still working with OMB" on farm loss assistance figures and USDA had no timetable for when final emergency assistance numbers would be available.

The last 60 days were critical in measuring how much emergency farm aid would be necessary, Glickman said, noting possible rain damage of the durum wheat crop in North Dakota and ongoing drought damage in the south.

The Senate has approved roughly \$2 billion in emergency aid for fiscal 2001, while the House has not. Glickman said he couldn't recommend the president sign any spending the fails to adequately fund USDA and provide disaster assistance. End

[Begin BridgeLinks]

Charles H. Featherstone, BridgeNews, Tel: 202-220-3729

Send comments to grain@bridge.com

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USDA says better job needed in segregating biotech crops

WASHINGTON, Sept 25 (Reuters) - Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman said Monday that Kraft Foods Inc's <MO.N> recall of taco shells containing an unapproved biotech corn variety showed the government has to do a better job of segregating gene-spliced grains and commodities.

"We've got to do a better job of segregating those commodities to make sure that...we basically protect people from things that haven't been approved," Glickman told reporters after speaking at a hunger forum.

He also praised the Food and Drug Administration for keeping a close eye on the situation.

"The FDA is monitoring the situation very closely, very carefully," Glickman said. "I don't think there is any public health and safety issue here but the fact is the product has not been approved for human consumption. It should not be served."

Kraft announced the recall on Friday after finding evidence that a variety of Bt corn approved only for animal feed was in some taco shells it manufactured. The corn has not been allowed in human food because of scientists' worry that it might be an allergen.

The USDA, FDA and Environmental Protection Agency share responsibility for regulating biotech foods. The USDA has authority over farm field testing of new biotech crops, while the EPA is responsible for evaluating crops that have been genetically altered to repel pests.

The FDA is now finalizing rules that will mandate consultations between agency scientists and food companies developing new varieties of gene-spliced products. Currently, those consultations are voluntary.

The agency is also working on guidelines for food manufacturers who want to add a label indicating whether a food does or does not contain a gene-modified ingredient.

Another speaker at the hunger meeting, the Rockefeller Foundation's Gordan Conway, said the U.S. government should require labels on genetically modified food.

"I believe there is a large consumer demand for it. It's as simple as that," said the head of the philanthropic group which supports the development of biotech crops to help improve yields in the Third World.

Conway also said he did not believe biotech food presented any "serious health hazard."

((washington.commodsenery.newsroom@reuters.com))

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108

[Bridged] (B) GMOs: Glickman says crops may need human approval before introduction

-- (B) GMOs: Glickman says crops may need human approval before introduction --
By Charles H. Featherstone, BridgeNews

Washington--Oct. 2--U.S. environmental and food and drug regulators should consider barring the promotion of future biotech foods until they have been approved for human consumption as a way to boost consumer confidence in the food supply, USDA Secretary Dan Glickman said Monday.

110

Glickman was responding to questions from reporters about USDA's announcement Friday that Aventis CropSciences will buy all of this year's crop of StarLink corn grown by U.S. farmers because traces of the corn--which has not been approved for human consumption--was found in commercially available processed foods.

According to Keith Pitts, senior aide to Glickman for biotechnology, USDA and EPA stepped in last week to require Aventis to purchase all of its StarLink corn after the two agencies became concerned that the company was not living up to its licensing agreement to prevent the crop from entering the human food system.

Pitts said the purchase--which he estimated costing Aventis somewhere between 590 million and \$100 million--will be managed by USDA's Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC). CCC will store all of the corn until Aventis presents a plan to dispose of the corn, either for ethanol manufacture or as animal feed.

Matt Rand, co-coordinator of GE Food Alert's U.S. campaign, told BridgeNews Monday that he was pleased that USDA and EPA acted to have Aventis purchase the entire crop, but said such measures were no substitute for rigorous testing and stronger regulation by the EPA and FDA.

"We're very disappointed with FDA," Rand said. "They are not taking this as seriously as they should."

Rand said that there would be further problems with unapproved biotech crops in the food system as long as companies were allowed to police themselves.

According to Pitts, FDA has confirmed the presence of StarLink's genetically altered DNA in the Taco Bell taco shells originally tested by the consumer and environmental groups.

Pitts said that FDA has not found any traces of a suspect protein produced by the StarLink corn. The protein possesses chemical properties similar to known food allergens, and while StarLink corn is not known to cause any allergic reactions in people, the presence of the protein has held up its approval in human food.

StarLink corn is one of eight different types of Bt corn, which use a gene from a bacterium to produce a "natural" insecticide designed to ward off the European corn borer beetle larva. Of the approved types, it is the only form of GMO corn that articulates an allergen-like protein. End

USDA reimburses fruit growers hurt by citrus canker

WASHINGTON, Oct 17 (Reuters) - Florida fruit growers devastated by the destructive citrus canker this crop season are eligible for federal reimbursement of up to \$4,004 per acre for their losses, U.S. Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman said Tuesday.

Glickman said eligible owners will receive \$26 per tree with a cap ranging between \$2,704 to \$4,004 per acre depending on the tree type.

Citrus canker is a bacteria that does not harm humans, but is highly contagious for fruit trees and can lead to huge economic losses in citrus orchards. Symptoms on infected citrus plants include brown, raised lesions surrounded by an oily, water-soaked base and a yellow ring or halo.

"This assistance is critically needed to help reduce the economic effect of the citrus canker quarantine on affected commercial citrus growers in Florida," Glickman said in a statement.

"More than 700,000 commercial citrus trees have been destroyed so far to combat this devastating outbreak," he added.

Glickman said the USDA also plans to publish soon a proposed rule that will include compensatory payments for commercial citrus growers who have or will incur income losses due to regulatory actions taken to eradicate citrus canker.

((Randy Fabi, Washington Commodities, 202-898-8394, fax 202-863-1049))

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113

By Cameron Dueck, BridgeNews

Boca Raton, Fla. -- Oct. 27 -- U.S. corn exports could see a temporary "blip" from the StarLink corn mix-up, but the scandal should not have a long-term impact on exports, USDA Secretary Dan Glickman said on Friday. The genetically engineered corn, which has been approved only for animal consumption, has been commingled with corn used for human consumption, leading to a recall of the corn and threats from importers that they may halt their buying of U.S. corn.

"While there may be a little blip in the very short term, overall, if we act quickly to find this corn, act in good faith, let the world know our exports of this corn and that the corn was not intended for human consumption, if we work with foreign governments, I would think it would not only be a negative, it could become a positive, in terms of other parts of the world believing that we're on top of the situation," Glickman said in an interview on the sidelines of the Business Council meeting here.

StarLink corn produces its own insecticide from bacteria genes grafted into the plant's DNA. Created by Aventis CropSciences, a unit of the French pharmaceutical firm Aventis SA, the corn was not approved for human consumption because of the potential risk of allergic reactions in humans but was cleared for use as an animal feed.

The corn variety has been involved in recent food recalls in the United States, and earlier this week Japanese officials announced that traces had been found in a baking mix called "Home Made Baking." Japanese importers said they may temporarily halt their U.S. corn purchases until it is guaranteed to be free of the hybrid.

"It would be logical to assume that some people that are buying our product would be asking questions," Glickman said. "But I do not believe this will have any medium- or long-term negative effect on agriculture or agriculture sales overseas."

"We need to get it out of the potential food supply, and that's what we've been doing by helping the company identify where the corn is and getting it into other markets," he said.

Glickman's aides said all but 1.2 million bushels of this year's 80 million bushels of StarLink corn in the market have been located. Glickman said the recovery of the corn is expected to cost between \$80 million and \$100 million, and much of that cost will be passed on to Aventis.

"I personally don't believe that this represents any health concerns for the public, but on the other hand, it has not been approved for human consumption, so we cannot let it out there for that process," Glickman said.

He said the USDA in the last 24 hours has notified exporters of what they must do in order to ship the product safely.

While the USDA is finding this year's corn, last year's crop will be harder to locate and pull out of the market.

"I'm sure I've eaten a lot of it because I eat a lot of tacos, and so far nothing has happened," Glickman said. "With a product like corn or soybeans, that is so fungible, that so easily can go into both markets, we will not be able to, as a government, approve it for one use only."

Glickman said that when StarLink was approved for animal feed, it was believed that modified crops could be kept separate from non-modified crops, which since has proven to be nearly impossible. "The company in question,

Aventis, committed it would segregate it, they committed they would notify farmers on the segregation, and it just didn't work. The company didn't perform its responsibilities fully, or farmers commingled their crop, we don't know how it happened."

Glickman would not comment on whether Aventis could face regulatory action for its mistakes.

He said modified crops must be approved for both human and animal consumption in the future.

"This is the only product of its type that was not approved for both human and animal consumption," Glickman said. "It was approved only for animal consumption. We cannot do that anymore."

Glickman said he expects the food industry eventually will require labeling of products that contain genetically modified grains, although reliable tests

for modified grains first need to be developed.

"I think we're going to see much more labeling in the future than we do now," Glickman said. "I don't think we should be afraid of labeling." End

[Begin BridgeLinks]

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113

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109
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DAVID HAFFENREFFER, CORRESPONDENT, CEO SUMMIT: Well, Bill there have been a lot of topics discussed this year's business council meeting. And essentially once the survey comes out the chairmen and CEOs have a chance to get into these session where they discuss topics that might be of interest to them. Among the topics that we've already seen spoken about here, over last couple of days, demographic and population trends. Also how technological advances will affect our quality of life. Today, "Feeding the Masses". And we're thrilled to have as a guest with us today the Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman, joining us.

DAN GLICKMAN, SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE: Thank you. HAFFENREFFER: Welcome. The title of the speech is "Feeding the Masses: The Role of Genetically Modified Foods". And you have yet to give the speech. You're going to in about a half hour's time. What is among some of the more important points you'll be making today.

GLICKMAN: Well, I think the recognition that we've got about a billion people in this world who are seriously under fed or are engaged in a famine or starvation mode. And there is probably no way to feed them in a sustainable way. That is without ripping up the soil and the forest and everything else, without using new technology. Genetic engineering to try to—let's say, increase yields, reduce the need for water, those kinds of things—will allow them to become more self-sufficient. And that's also true, frankly, in developed world. Even the United States, we're going to find the need to make our products better. More nutritious, being more positive in the environment. And it's not likely we can do that without using new techniques like genetic engineering.

HAFFENREFFER: Are they U.S.-based companies that are at the forefront of this technology?

GLICKMAN: Both U.S. and European, although the U.S. has had a leadership role in these areas.

HAFFENREFFER: What is being done as far as providing food for

these nations? I understand the U.S. is making - is doing quite an effort, perhaps almost all of the effort.

GLICKMAN: Well, so far we've been providing a lot of food assistance to the world. The U.S. provides almost 2/3 of this year's food assistance to the world. And in sub-Saharan Africa all the hungry people - in fact, there's been famine averted because of U.S. food assistance. But we do need to continue our research and development of products where we can enhance the production of food using new technologies. But we also have to make sure that regulatory system is fair and balanced and impartial, because we don't want to jeopardize consumer confidence that the food supply is safe.

HAFENREFFE: I do want to ask you about Star Link, this was this genetically modified corn that was approved for animal use only, not humans. It did shift its way onto the grocery store shelves awhile back. Now there are some concerns from overseas that it might be getting into their food as well. What's being done on this front?

GLICKMAN: Well, the government; EPA, USDA, the Food & Drug Administration, are doing our best to try to help get this product out of the food supply. This is the only product of it's type that's been approved, to date, that was not approved for human consumption, only for animal consumption. And it did in some mistaken way get into at least a portion of food supply. I mean, I personally don't believe that it's dangerous to anybody's health. But it has not been approved for human consumption. Some of the companies have withdrawn things like taco shells, other kinds of things. The cereal companies have indicated some concern. So, we need to get that out of the food supply, particularly to give the public confidence that the regulatory system is working. I personally, again, don't believe that there's any danger to it, however.

HAFENREFFER: Are we likely to see other foods in future being approved just for animal use and not for human use? Or are we likely to see that go away?

GLICKMAN: I don't think so. I think this is - we've learned that if we are going to approve a food for animal use, a genetically engineered food, it's got to be approved for human use and both or else we shouldn't do it all. Because this is - given the way the fact that most of the corn and a lot of the soybeans we produce go into both food and in animal use that you can't keep them separate anymore.

HAFENREFFER: Right now, Japan has voiced some concerns about corn that they're receiving from U.S.?

GLICKMAN: We have a team over in Japan right now. Japan is a very large customer of U.S. agricultural products, corn particularly. And we are doing our best to assure them that we're on top of the situation. And we're getting this out of the food supply.

HAFFENREFFER: All right, Secretary Glickman, Thanks for stepping
by. Good luck on your speech.
GLICKMAN: Thank you.

3083

Despite Starlink woes, Glickman sees GMO seed growth

By Vanessa Morse

WICHITA, Kan., Nov 20 (Reuters) - U.S. Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman said Monday he did not think the current controversy over Starlink corn would have a long-term negative impact on the use of bio-engineered grain seed in the U.S.

With proper testing and full disclosure about test findings, Glickman said the problems with Starlink and related fears about the growing use of genetically modified seeds could be overcome.

"The most important thing we need to have is good testing and good disclosure to the farmers and to the public," Glickman told a Reuters reporter. "If we base this on sound science, the market will continue to expand for bio-engineered seeds and foods."

Glickman's comments followed an address to the Kansas Association of Conservation Districts annual meeting in Wichita Monday.

Starlink is a genetically modified corn variety that is approved only for animal feed, but has been found mixed into human food items like chips and taco shells.

More than 300 food brands have been recalled from grocery store shelves across the United States because of Starlink contamination and American corn exports have been feeling a backlash from overseas buyers who fear buying U.S. corn because it may be contaminated with Starlink.

Last week, the USDA issued a weekly report showing U.S. corn exports were 39 percent below the four-week average. Both Japan, the single biggest buyer of American corn, and South Korea, have curtailed corn purchases from the U.S. because of the issue.

Glickman said he had high hopes the testing of export corn for Starlink that began last week would go a long way toward alleviating concerns of foreign buyers.

"I believe we can work out the problems with testing and with the transparent system those problems can get resolved," Glickman said. "They (foreign buyers) want to know what's in their corn and they want to make sure it's corn that is destined for food consumption. That is our goal as well."

Glickman said it was crucial that testing work properly to differentiate Starlink from non-Starlink corn.

"It's very important that it goes well and people believe that it has a lot of credibility to it. I think time will tell, but I'm hopeful," Glickman said.

On Monday, the Wall Street Journal reported that some large grain processing companies were discouraging U.S. farmers from planting genetically modified grain seed in light of numerous problems that have cropped up lately with keeping genetically modified grains separate from non-GMO grains.

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110

NY Times 11-30-00 C4

NEW SALES AGENT FOR MODIFIED CROPS? The Agriculture



Department is considering playing a broader role in helping market genetically engineered crops and in segregating those crops from nonengineered ones, Dan Glickman, the department secretary, said yesterday. Some countries and food processors are demanding only nonmodified crops,

a development that threatens American farm exports, unless the identity of varieties can be guaranteed. The Agriculture Department is seeking public comment on whether it should be involved in accrediting, reviewing or certifying the performance of programs aimed at ensuring that crops are not contaminated by other varieties.

Andrew Pollack (NYT)

C4

105

Washington Times B11

Better controls eyed for biotech crops

ASSOCIATED PRESS

The government is considering ways to improve the tracking and detection of genetically engineered crops as a result of problems with a type of biotech corn that inadvertently got into the food supply.

U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman said yesterday that his agency will take public comment on a series of steps to facilitate the marketing of biotech crops and to keep them separate from conventional food.

Those steps would include establishing definitions for biotech and conventional crops as part of

its system of quality grades and standards.

"In order to protect our domestic and foreign markets and ensure public confidence, it's essential that we improve our ability to identify and track genetically modified farm products," Mr. Glickman said.

Corn exports dropped sharply this fall after the disclosure that the unapproved biotech corn, known as StarLink, had been used in taco shells. The problem also has forced some processors to shut down and has snarled grain shipping in Iowa and other parts of the Midwest.

Mr. Glickman blamed the prob-

lem on the corn's developer, Aventis CropScience, which was supposed to ensure that the corn was used only for animal feed or industrial purposes such as production of ethanol, a gasoline additive. It has not been approved for human consumption.

In addition to considering new rules for the handling of biotech crops, the department is pondering how to regulate ornamental grasses and trees being developed through genetic engineering. Agriculture Department officials are concerned about the new plants possibly cross-pollinating with weedy relatives and causing environmental damage.

WTB11

WASHINGTON (AP) The government is looking to improve the tracking and detection of biotech crops to protect markets for both gene-altered and conventional foods, and avoid further disruptions in grain trading and processing.

In order to protect our domestic and foreign markets and ensure public confidence, it's essential that we improve our ability to identify and track genetically modified products," Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman said Wednesday.

He said the department will take public comment on steps his department could take, including setting definitions for biotech and conventional crops as part of the government's system of quality grades and standards.

The Agriculture Department also could start certifying grain-handling systems to ensure they keep biotech crops separate from conventionally bred varieties.

Since the spring, the agency has worked on the ideas, which took on a new urgency when a variety of biotech corn not approved for human consumption was discovered in taco shells this fall. Some food processors had to suspend operations to clean out the grain, and U.S. corn exports have dropped sharply.

Glickman blamed the crop's developer, Aventis CropScience, which was supposed to ensure that its StarLink corn was only used for animal feed or industrial uses, such as production of ethanol, a gasoline additive.

Agriculture experts and food industry officials say the problem exposed flaws in farm practices and the nation's grain-handling system. Some farmers did not keep track of where they planted the corn, while others apparently were not told of government-imposed restrictions on how the crop was to be grown and used.

The StarLink problem illustrates how difficult the segregation problem will be. I don't think this is something that processors and industry can work out themselves. Having a USDA role will be helpful," said Jane Rissler, a biotech specialist with the Union of Concerned Scientists, an advocacy group.

She and other biotech critics believe the government should go further and require the labeling of foods containing biotech ingredients, an idea the Clinton administration has rejected.

But both consumers and the biotech industry could benefit if the Agriculture Department improves the tracking of biotech crops, said Kelly Johnston, executive vice president of government affairs for the National Food Processors Association.

For example, consumers would know for sure whether food that claims to be free of biotech ingredients really is, he said. "Those who want that kind of choice ought to be willing to bear the cost of doing that," he added.

Any decision on new regulations would be up to the next administration because Glickman will leave office in January.

The Agriculture Department also is weighing how to regulate trees and ornamental plants being developed through genetic engineering, Glickman said. Agency officials are concerned about the new plants cross-pollinating with weedy relatives and causing environmental damage.

Dozens of field trials are being conducted on various trees, flowers and grasses that have been engineered to have special traits.

They include varieties of Kentucky bluegrass that would be resistant to drought or weedkillers; petunias whose flowers would stay on longer; and poplartrees that could resist insects or fungus.

105

[BMNRCDT] [B] GMOs: Glickman says USDA to evaluate new crops, terminator genes.

-- [B] GMOs: Glickman says USDA to evaluate new crops, terminator genes --
By Charles H. Featherstone, BridgeNews

106

Washington--Nov. 29--USDA will evaluate the potential environmental consequences of an upcoming generation of biotech grasses and commercially grown trees, the future of the so-called "terminator" technology, and will work in cooperation with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to ensure proper evaluation of these future crops, USDA Secretary Dan Glickman said.

Speaking at the opening of a two-day meeting of USDA biotechnology advisory committee, Glickman said that USDA "must not refrain from asking hard questions" about the role of agricultural biotechnology and USDA's part in both regulating and promoting it.

Part of that process will involve seeking public input on USDA's role in agricultural biotechnology, Glickman said, including USDA's involvement in certifying private identity-preservation systems, accreditation of private labs and the use of biotech and non-biotech crop definitions as part of the grain standards system.

USDA currently promotes, through the cooperative extension service as well as in its own research labs, research into plant genetics. USDA holds a number of biotech patents, including the patent on the so-called "terminator" gene, which prevents a seed from germinating unless it is "activated" by a certain chemical.

The technology was developed to ensure that biotech crops would not proliferate uncontrolled in the wild, but many critics fear that large biotechnology companies will use the technology to make farmers dependent on their seeds and their chemicals.

Keith Pitts, special adviser to Glickman on biotech issues, said Glickman would determine how seed sterilization genes would be licensed to companies before he leaves office on Jan. 20.

Currently, the Delta Pineland seed company holds a license for the technology.

Glickman also said a long-promised biotech testing and accreditation lab in Kansas City, Mo., will open in January. The lab will certify other testing labs, biotech testing kits and will maintain a library of genetically engineered crops.

COMMITTEE TO LOOK USDA ROLE IN PLANT BREEDING, LIABILITY ON GENE FLOW

Glickman said the main issues facing the advisory committee during the next two days of discussions are what role USDA should play in plant breeding and the flow of genetically altered genes in the environment.

With more and more plant breeding research being done and patented by private companies, Glickman said that USDA needed to look at its role in ensuring that some plant research remains in the public sphere.

"Consolidation in the seed business could limit choices (made by farmers," he said. "Some breeds may need government aid."

Pitts said the committee would discuss StarLink corn but probably would not make any recommendations to USDA on how to deal with the issue.

"Down the road, there will be follow-ups on StarLink," he said. End

[Begin BridgeLinks]

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INTERVIEW-More US firms seen adopting bio-food labels

By Julie Vorman

WASHINGTON, Nov 27 (Reuters) - Regardless of how the StarLink bio-corn safety debate plays out, more U.S. foodmakers will likely begin voluntarily labeling products with gene-spliced ingredients to give consumers more information, Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman told Reuters on Monday.

Labeling is one of the key issues in the battle between U.S. environmentalists and agribusiness over regulation of bio-foods.

Many European and Asian nations already require labels on foods containing genetically modified corn, soybeans, tomatoes and other crops. But American industry groups oppose mandatory labeling in the United States because of the cost and the worry that consumers may interpret it as a warning that a food is less safe.

The recent controversy over StarLink-gene-spliced corn -- a variety not approved for use in human food but found in tacos and chips -- has raised fresh questions about bioengineered foods.

"I think the trend is unstoppable toward more and more labeling," Glickman said in an interview.

"We've got to recognize that the consumer is king or queen in this mess," he said. "Folks are going to want to know what's in their food."

Glickman, who is wrapping up nearly six years as President Bill Clinton's agriculture secretary, has long been an advocate of biotechnology as a way to improve farm yields and reduce pesticides. All the gene-altered foods now on the market have been thoroughly tested and are safe for human health and the environment, he said.

"By fighting labeling, you give the impression that there is something wrong with the product," Glickman added.

NO NEED FOR LABEL MANDATE

While labels may be needed to satisfy consumer hunger for more information about foods they buy, the government should not require them, Glickman said.

"I'm not calling for mandatory labeling because we don't have any of the testing and threshold mechanisms, or would really know how to do it," he said.

But many foodmakers, which are keenly aware of consumer shopping habits and preferences, are likely to adopt voluntary labels.

"You're going to find more and more companies engaged in labeling," Glickman said. "We have to work with them to make sure it's sensible, that the labeling means something and that it's not frightening."

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration, which has authority over food labels, is expected to soon issue guidelines to be used by companies that want to voluntarily label foods. The FDA is also expected to begin requiring companies to consult with agency scientists before taking new bio-food to market.

Currently, only a few foods sold in organic food stores carry labels which say they are free of any biotech crops. Industry experts have estimated that more than half of U.S. foods sold in typical grocery stores -- ranging from salad dressings to snack foods to breakfast cereals -- contain gene-altered soybeans, corn or other crops.

107
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Two bills that would require some form of labeling were introduced earlier this year in the U.S. Congress by Sen. Barbara Boxer of California and Rep. Dennis Kucinich of Ohio, both Democrats. The legislation is likely to resurface when the new Congress meets in January, although it remains unclear how much bipartisan support the bills can muster.

Jeff

STARLINK DOMINATES BIO-FOOD DEBATE

The discovery of StarLink contamination in taco shells, chips and cornmeal in late September has focused new attention on biotech crops.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is set to hold a public hearing on Tuesday as regulators consider whether to grant temporary approval of StarLink in human food. If they do not, StarLink maker Aventis SA <AVEP.PA> may face tens of millions of dollars in liability claims by foodmakers, grain elevators, farmers and consumers.

Aventis, which has submitted new science data to the EPA, contends StarLink is safe for human consumption and carries little, if any, risk of triggering diarrhea, rashes, respiratory problems or other allergic reactions.

Meanwhile, the USDA is continuing to help Aventis buy back as much of the autumn StarLink harvest as possible to prevent it from tainting the food supply.

The action to strictly segregate StarLink corn for animal feed or ethanol production is being carried out "on a product which in my judgment has no human health risks whatsoever," Glickman said.

"Production agriculture, consumer groups and the food companies are all going to have a few years of major challenges as we look at the science of these issues and as we see how they should be properly regulated," he said. "We're facing that now during the StarLink discussion."

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