

Food for Thought: Informing the Global Development Policy Debate on Ag-biotech

Judith Chambers, Ph.D.

Director, International Food Policy Research Institute, Program for Biosafety Systems, Washington, D.C., USA

*e-mail: j.chambers@cgiar.org

Abstract

With more than two decades of safe application and use in agriculture, especially in many “first adopter” nations, the tools of biotechnology have a proven history of delivering benefits. Yet, for many farmers and consumers in emerging countries, access to this technology, and its potential benefits, remains elusive. Scientific misinformation, trade dynamics, under-investment in agriculture research and issues around equity, accessibility and appropriate regulation continue to impact adoption in many less developed countries (LDCs). The result is a circular global dialogue around risks vs. benefits and the role that a more informed, evidence-led debate could have on prospects for technology adoption to improve the lives of farmers and consumers in the developing world. The presentation will examine opportunities, constraints and issues related to equitable technology access, R&D, the role of public sector research (such as One CGIAR), regulation, political economy considerations, and global misinformation campaigns. It will discuss a range of impacts on current and future adoption for ag-biotech products and technologies to support more resilient, pro-poor global food systems. It will also compare these issues as they relate to first- and next-generation biotechnologies (e.g., transgenics vs. genome editing). For both, the discussion will cover considerations of local context for decision making, interventions to improve awareness, policy outcomes and the delivery of benefits.

Key words: biotechnology, policy, risk-benefit, food security, genome editing, equitable access