

Opinion & Mailbox

Biotech really does bring higher yields

Commentary

By TERRY WANZEK

THE anti-biotechnology crowd has adopted a new talking point, claiming that biotechnology does not increase yields. Have these people never been to a farm to see what weeds and insects do to crop yields?

Activist groups are highly skilled at finding a fact and distorting it for their agenda. For this new talking point, they have twisted an April 2006 USDA report. The report is supportive of biotechnology overall, but the activists found part of one paragraph they could exploit. Here's the quote they like to cite:

"Currently available [genetically engineered] crops do not increase the yield potential of a hybrid variety. In fact, yield may even decrease if the varieties used to carry the herbicide-tolerant or insect-resistant genes are not the highest-yielding cultivars."

They ignore the rest of the paragraph, which states: "However, by protecting the plant from certain pests, GE [biotech] crops can prevent yield losses compared to non-GE hybrids, particularly when pest infestation is high. This effect is particularly important for Bt crops."

The real point

The point is that biotechnology helps prevent yield loss to ensure that corn hybrids and soybean varieties produce to their full potential. When biotech traits first came out, they were not available in the top-performing hybrids due to the

lead time needed to introduce the trait. Today, biotech traits are in the best hybrids and varieties.

It is true that no current biotech seed contains a "yield" gene as such, but there is no question that the improved weed control and insect protection do a better job of protecting yields than other forms of pest control.

On my own farm, we used to get, at best, 80- to 100-bushel corn crops before the advent of herbicide-tolerant corn. Today, we're averaging 130 to 160 bushels. This is a direct result of the ability to plant early because of assured weed control and the ability to no-till, which preserves soil moisture. Using glyphosate instead of other herbicides reduces crop injury, too.

A new study by the European Commission's Joint Research Center found that Spanish farmers who planted insect-protected biotech corn had up to 11.8% higher yields than farmers who protected their crop with insecticide sprays. This is the first such study conducted in Europe, but many studies in the U.S. have documented higher yields attributable to biotech adoption.

A 2006 study by the National Center for Food and Agricultural Policy found that biotech crops planted in 2005 helped increase food production by 8.3 billion pounds and reduced pesticide usage by 69.7 million pounds.

The first decade of biotech development has succeeded in protecting yield potential. The biotech pipeline will continue that trend and, in addition, new traits will actually increase yield potential. Roundup Ready2 Yield soybeans, to be

introduced in 2009, enable the same high-quality weed control as the current Roundup Ready trait, but this second generation yields on average 9% more per acre. The difference is that scientists learned how to insert the biotech trait into the genome at a site that results in higher yield.

This advancement in technology at the molecular level is enabling genetic scientists to exploit untapped yield potentials of the world's crop acreage. The continued development of new technologies is the best hope farmers and the public have of meeting the incredible growing demand for food, feed, fiber and biofuels in the coming decades.

While naysayers continue to twist facts and stick their heads in the sand, farmers are putting biotech seeds into the ground and producing higher yields for all.

Wanzek, who farms near Jamestown, N.D., is a board member of Growers for Biotechnology. For more information, go to www.growersforbiotechnology.org.

Your Say

Celebrating 25 years of conservation winners

Thank you for a great day at the Farm Science Review. And thank you for your continuing support of the Ohio Conservation Farm Family Awards program!

A neighbor friend made me a copy of this picture taken in front of the *Ohio Farmer* building at the very first awards ceremony (25 years ago) during the Farm Science Review in September 1984. Pictured from left to right are Larry Vance, chief of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources Division of Soil and Water Conservation; Gov. Richard F. Celeste; George Sharec; Ruth Sharec; Dale L. Locker, director of the Ohio Department of Agriculture; and Andy Stevens, editor of the *Ohio Farmer* magazine.

The sign that was awarded to us that day is still displayed in front of our garage facing the driveway. (You can see the sign in the lower left corner of the photo.)

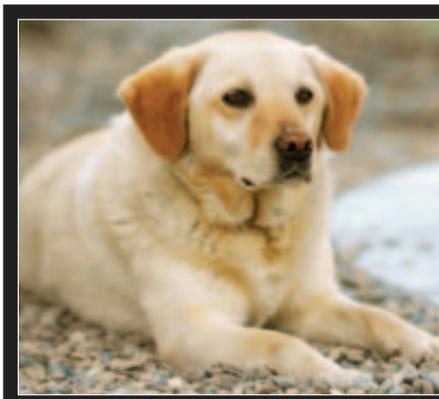
Again, thank you for a great day and have a good year.

Ruth Sharec
Newton Falls



Calling all farm dogs

THIS is the last call for photos of your favorite canine companions. We want to see how man's best friend spends his or her time at your farm. Entries are due by Dec. 1 so we can pick the winners and feature them in the December issue of *Ohio Farmer*. Send a print, send a slide or send an e-mail, but send them to our address: *Ohio Farmer*, Suite 202, 117 W. Main St. Lancaster, OH 43130. You can also e-mail a high resolution digital image to twhite@farmprogress.com. All entries win an *Ohio Farmer* hat, and you could win any one of the other prizes. Last chance. Think of how proud your pup would be to see his smiling face in the *Ohio Farmer*. Send your photo in today.



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