

## **GMO foods can bring benefits, vigilance needed-WHO**

23 Jun 2005 12:44:37 GMT

Source: Reuters

(Updates with news conference)

By Richard Waddington

GENEVA, June 23 (Reuters) - Genetically-modified foods can bring benefits both to farmers and consumers, but safety checks will always be needed before they are marketed, the World Health Organisation said on Thursday.

As the debate rages in Europe on what are often branded there as "Frankenstein" foods, the United Nations' health agency said there was no evidence to suggest that any foods currently on the market posed health risks. In a 58-page report, the WHO said genetically-modified organisms (GMO) can increase crop yields and food quality, thereby improving health and levels of nutrition, as well as boost profits for farmers and industry.

But since some of the genes used in GMO crops have not been in the food chain before, the potential effects on health and society must always be assessed before they are grown and sold.

"We have no data suggesting that GMO foods on the market are not safe, but that is not the same as saying GMO foods in the future are automatically safe," said Jorgen Schlundt, director of the WHO's food safety department.

"Current GMO foods can bring benefits, but safety assessments must continue. That is one of the main conclusions of the report," he added.

No absolute guarantees could be given about any foods, whether scientifically modified or not, he said, noting that even in the United States 5,000 people died each year from microbiological infections such as salmonella poisoning.

### **SENSITIVE SUBJECT**

Furthermore, the argument over GMOs was complex and involved questions ranging from the impact on the environment, which could vary from one country or region to another, to issues of intellectual property rights, Schlundt said.

The subject is sensitive in Europe, where consumers are generally suspicious of GMOs, and the European Union is locked in a trade row with the United States, Canada and Argentina over Brussels' reluctance to authorise new imports.

An initial ruling by the World Trade Organisation (WTO) is due in early October.

The WHO said some 800 million people in developing countries were undernourished, despite a 50 percent decline in world food prices over the past two decades, and the global population was expected to reach eight billion in 2025 compared to six at the moment.

Although they were not a panacea, GMOs could play a role in helping to meet future food needs. They could also help to remedy vitamin and iron deficiencies in some poorer populations.

"Producing nutritionally enhanced properties in staple crops eaten by the poor could reduce the burden of disease in many developing countries," the WHO said in the report.

By cutting down on the use of often health-threatening pesticides, GMO crops could also bring other benefits to farmers in poorer countries, it added.

But so far all this remained little more than a hope because most of the effort put into developing GMOs had focused on crops grown in the richer countries.

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## **Asian nations call for broader focus to boost health of world's poor**

Wed Jun 22, 7:34 AM ET

Development officials from Asia-Pacific nations and international organizations said that a broader view looking at all sectors was needed to help poorer countries improve public health.

Officials from 30 donor and developing nations and 12 international organizations held two days of talks in Tokyo on ways for Asia to meet the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) set in 2000 to slash poverty.

A joint statement said that while there was a consensus on improving health, too little attention was focused on the "notion that non-health sector actions are also needed to successfully achieve health sector objectives."

An approach "combining health, nutrition, education, agriculture and infrastructure, as well as addressing cross-cutting issues such as gender, environment and governance, can be highly effective in achieving health MDGs."

It cited as an example a need to build suitable transportation to ensure access to health services.

Donors' money too often is spent only on expensive medical equipment that helps urban residents, said Shigeru Omi, regional director of the Western Pacific Regional Office of World Health Organization, which co-sponsored the Tokyo meeting.

"Many developing countries lack human resources," Omi told a press conference. "Especially in remote rural areas, there are few skilled health workers."

Fadia Saadah, a health expert at the World Bank, added that focusing on health issues would "pay back" developing countries in terms of growth.

"Achieving MDGs needs lots of resources, but it is sustainable only by achieving economic growth," Saadah said.

The Tokyo talks were held ahead of a July 6-8 summit in Scotland of the Group of Eight industrialized nations which is expected to focus on development.

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## **World Bank helps China scale up use of renewable energy**

**2005-06-21 20:17:26**

BEIJING, June 21 (Xinhuanet) -- The World Bank's Board of Executive Directors has lately approved a loan of 87 million US dollars to China for a program aiming to scale up the country's use of renewable energy, the China Economic Times reported here Tuesday.

This financial support together with a grant-in-aid of 40.22 million US dollars from the Global Environment Facility is the largest ever sum China has received so far in this regard, said the report.

The Renewable Energy Scale-up Program will be used to finance the Chinese government's strategy to start further development of projects and the transfer of up-to-date wind and biomass technology from international suppliers.

Fujian, Inner Mongolia, Jiangsu and Zhejiang are four pilot regions to get the financial support, where a 100 MW wind farm in Fujian and a pilot 25 MW biomass-fired generation unit in Jiangsu will be financed.

Calling China "a world leader in the development of renewable energy resources, especially small hydropower", the report said China has been focusing its efforts on providing rural areas afar from power grids with access to electricity in the past.

Given that China has abundant resources of small hydropower, wind, biomass, geothermal and solar energy to be tapped, which could also help the country reduce some of the environmental damage from its overwhelming dependence on coal for large-scale, grid-based power generation, the Chinese government has devised a comprehensive renewable energy strategy for making power generation from renewable energy sources.

According to the report, the official renewable energy strategy consists of three parts. The first is to design and put in place a legal and regulatory framework that encourages the development of economic renewable energy resources in line with power sector reforms that include the creation of a more competitive power market.

The second is to provide potential power producers with access to advanced technology and knowhows that will make renewable energy more competitive with fossil fuels in power generation.

The third is to strengthen the capacity of existing companies to develop, finance, construct and operate renewable energy projects for power generation on a large scale, and further open the sector to private investors.

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## Generic drugs key to uphill AIDS fight, WHO says

21 Jun 2005 08:38:35 GMT

Source: Reuters

By Ben Hirschler

VALLETTA, June 21 (Reuters) - Generic drugs hold the key to AIDS treatment in the developing world, although a target of getting 3 million people on therapy by the end of 2005 may now be out of reach, according to the World Health Organisation.

Hans Hogerzeil, its director of medicines policy and standards, said around half of those on AIDS drugs in poor countries were taking generic tablets, most of them made in India.

Speaking at a pharmaceuticals conference in Malta, he urged the United States to work with the world health body to include more generics in its AIDS treatment programmes, which currently mainly use more expensive branded medicines.

Worldwide, the number of patients on generic antiretroviral drugs was increasing, he said, despite a problem last year when the WHO delisted some Indian generics which had not been proved to be equivalent to their patented counterparts.

Hogerzeil said the suspensions from the WHO's pre-qualification list was regrettable but had not been a major setback.

The first batch of delisted antiretroviral medicines from India's Cipla Ltd. <CIPL.BO> was reinstated in November, after fresh tests, and others from Ranbaxy Laboratories Ltd. <RANB.BO> should return in the coming months, he added.

"It's been a difficult message for people to understand, but there were always sufficient pre-qualified products available," Hogerzeil told Reuters on the fringes the meeting.

The number of people in developing countries receiving treatment at the end of 2004 was 700,000 - an increase of 75 percent from the year before but still only a fraction of those in need.

"Reaching the 3 million (target) by the end of 2005 may not be possible. It will also depend on developments in a few key countries, like India, South Africa, Nigeria and China," Hogerzeil said.

There is currently a gulf between the WHO approach to selecting medicines for the developing world and that of the United States, which requires all drugs supplied through its AIDS programme to be approved by the Food and Drug Administration.

Hogerzeil said this led to duplication and hampered the U.S. effort, since the FDA has approved only a handful of products, despite giving tentative approval to two more generics from India on Monday. The WHO, meanwhile, has around 80 on its list.

"We would very much recommend that the American programmes would recognise the WHO pre-qualification. It would save them a lot of time and it would give them access to many more

generics," he said. The arrival of Indian-made products that combine two or three medicines in one pill has brought the cost of first-line AIDS therapy in Africa down to around \$140-\$400 per patient a year, he estimates.

Most brand-name drugs, by contrast, still cost \$400-\$600, although some are as cheap as generics in certain markets

The next big challenge is to cut the cost of paediatric formulations and second-line treatments, which patients need to receive once they develop resistance to initial therapy.

Treating children with AIDS in poor countries currently costs \$1,000-\$1,500, reflecting an acute shortage of medication specially designed for children.

"Some of the Indian manufacturers are working on paediatric generics but there are very few available at the moment," Hogerzeil said.

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## **WHO sees number of vaccines doubling in decade**

15 Jun 2005 15:45:27 GMT

Source: Reuters

LONDON, June 15 (Reuters) - The number of vaccines available to prevent diseases is likely to double from the current 20 in the next decade or so, the World Health Organisation said on Wednesday.

New vaccines are being developed against a range of often deadly infectious diseases -- including meningitis, malaria and cervical cancer -- following recent scientific breakthroughs.

That has revived interest in the sector, with major vaccine makers like GlaxoSmithKline Plc <GSK.L>, Sanofi-Aventis <SASY.PA> and Merck & Co Inc <MRK.N> all highlighting the potential of their new or experimental products.

But Dr Marie-Paule Kieny, head of vaccine research for the global health body, said the world needed to do more to ensure these novel preventative treatments reached people in need in the developing world.

"These are exciting times in vaccine development. Several new products will soon be available that together could protect millions of lives from disease," she told a conference in Brazil.

"However, experience has shown that the uptake of new vaccines is extremely slow. We urgently must find solutions to deliver these powerful and proven health tools to all people at risk." Obstacles to delivering vaccines to people in need were scientific, financial, technical and regulatory, she said.

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## Yes, globe is warming, even if Bush denies it

As the world's sole superpower, the United States has tremendous influence. Beyond military might, it can shape issues from trade to terrorism to the environment. That's why future generations, say 100 years from now, might ask: So why didn't it get serious about global warming when it had the chance?

Good question.

The Bush administration's mantra on climate change is this: The science is not yet in to prove a link between man's gas-and-coal guzzling habits and rising global temperatures that are causing glaciers to shrink, polar ice caps to melt and seas to rise.

Yet, as USA TODAY's Dan Vergano reported Monday, not only is the science in, it is also overwhelming. Last week, the National Academy of Sciences and 10 other leading world bodies said there is "significant global warming" that requires urgent action.

### JOINT STATEMENT ON CLIMATE

Key points in a joint statement on global warming issued last week by 11 leading international science bodies, including the U.S. National Academy of Sciences:

- Significant global warming is occurring.
- It has caused increases in sea levels, retreats of glaciers and changes in many biological systems.
- Most warming in recent decades can likely be attributed to human activities, largely from developed countries.
- Action taken now to reduce the build-up of greenhouse gases will lessen the magnitude and rate of climate change.
- Failure to implement reductions now will make the job more difficult in the future.

Source: U.S. National Academy of Sciences

Another report last week further undercut claims of bad science: *The New York Times* disclosed that former oil industry lobbyist Philip Cooney, chief of staff of the White House Council on Environmental Quality, altered global warming reports to downplay links between emissions and climate change.

Cooney resigned, for what the White House insisted were unrelated reasons. President Bush repeated that the science is unclear.

Talk about the modern-day equivalent of the flat-Earth brigade. Taking action won't come cheap, but by denying the problem exists, Bush misses significant opportunities: •**Economic impact.** The USA is the leading emitter of greenhouse gases, more than one quarter of the world total. Logically, the administration says mandatory caps on carbon emissions would hurt the U.S. economy the most, driving up the cost of energy. How much is anybody's guess and depends on the approach. Today's opposing view estimates a global treaty would cost a family of four \$2,700 a year. Obviously a significant sum.

But there also are compensating benefits. Most nations in the developed world are already putting mandatory caps on emissions and providing "green" incentives. Because many U.S. corporations operate overseas, they are having to comply anyway.

In addition, major companies such as General Electric and Duke Energy are championing stronger government intervention. They crave an international uniformity of standards and general direction that they think is inevitable.

•**International goodwill.** In 2001, the administration walked away from a global treaty — the Kyoto Protocol — that, after years of difficult negotiations, committed developed nations to reductions and caps on carbon emissions. The treaty was flawed because it didn't involve rapidly industrializing countries such as China and India. But by quitting, the United States alienated allies and reduced its own influence.

Now, some states, notably California, are introducing mandatory caps. The U.S. Senate might try to include measures this week in a pending energy bill.

Next month, leaders of industrialized nations are meeting in Scotland. Britain is making global warming a central issue. If Bush joined in, he would do the planet, and future generations, a great favour.

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## **U.S. Mayors Agree to Adhere to Kyoto Pact**

*June 14, 2005 — By Dan Caterinicchia, Associated Press*

CHICAGO — The U.S. Conference of Mayors unanimously passed a resolution Monday requiring their cities to try to meet or surpass emissions standards set by the Kyoto Protocol, the international global-warming treaty ratified earlier this year without the United States.

The resolution also urges federal and state governments to meet or beat the goal of reducing global warming pollution levels to 7 percent below 1990 levels by 2012.

The cities' efforts will include reducing dependence on fossil fuels by accelerating development of fuel-efficient technologies such as wind and solar energy, efficient motor vehicles and biofuels.

President Bush opposes the 1997 Kyoto Protocol and the U.S. administration questions the certainty of scientists' views that "greenhouse gases" such as carbon dioxide are causing temperatures to rise. U.S. officials also argue the Kyoto requirements would increase energy prices and cost millions of U.S. jobs.

Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels, who sponsored the mayoral agreement and was in Chicago for the conference meeting, welcomed Monday's resolution.

"We're very pleased. ... Today is our first endorsement from a major organization," he said.

*Source: Associated Press*

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