

Preface

The pace of change seems boundless. New technologies, new products and new ideas emerge on such a rapid basis that simply staying abreast of the changes not only seems, but proves, daunting. Innovations in the tripartite fields of information, technology and communications (ITC) continue to advance based on Moore's Law. Some have boldly predicted, if not the end of this rapid rate of change, a slowdown in the pace of innovation, however, these predictions are all for naught. It is not out of reason that the twenty-first century will witness a greater degree of innovation than the innovation that occurred in all the centuries preceding it.

Accompanying innovation is change and change brings a multitude of responses. Change can be welcomed or rejected by some or can bring uncertainty for others, leading to trepidation, nervousness and in some instances fear. Although modern society is based on innovation, it is important to keep in mind that adoption occurs at varying rates for all sorts of reasons, with some countries and cultures leading the way, with others closely following, and yet others languish. Innovation displaces current practices and processes, most of these changes being beneficial, but not all. One thing common to all innovations is that they create considerable discourse. Agricultural biotechnology and the resulting genetically modified products have triggered rigorous international discussions, debates and dilemmas. Response to the innovation of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) has been diverse; with some jurisdictions preferring to rely on the market to determine the success of GMOs, while others have rationalized a more centralist approach and heavily regulated GM crops.

The global debate regarding the acceptance of GM crops has grown particularly acrimonious of late. Most opponents and advocates of the technology continue to talk past each other, with progress on resolving the regulation and trade of GM crops and food products moving at a glacial pace at best. The discussions are sporadically populated with evidence and facts, however, they are frequently rife with myths, rumours and innuendos. One way to distill the issue to its core is to observe that for the large part, many of the countries that have adopted and produced GM crops, have largely done so using science-based regulations, while non-adopters have often included socio-economic considerations (SECs) in domestic biosafety

regulations, as is allowed under Article 26 of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (CPB).

Given the global context of the debate on the regulation of GM crops and food products, there is a strong need for a book that compiles expert assessments of the issues relevant to SEC assessment of GMOs which are, ultimately, also fundamental for decisions regarding whether to undertake such assessments at all. To this end, we have produced an authored and edited book that provides an overview of the inclusion of SEC assessment in the regulation of GMOs, that:

1. Looks at the rationale for the inclusion of SECs, in the context of the existing science-based risk assessment systems;
2. Through the use of a chapter template, reviews the various factors that can and have been suggested for inclusion in SEC assessment; and
3. Provides a meaningful dialogue about the contrasts, benefits and tradeoffs that are, and will be, created by the potential move to the inclusion of SECs in the regulation of GMOs.

It is not intended to assess whether the inclusion of SECs should or should not occur. That is a policy decision to be made by policy-makers in each of the federal jurisdictions contemplating the inclusion of SECs into their domestic regulatory frameworks. Instead, this book is intended to assist in the development of best practice, methods and policy guidelines for SEC evaluation implementation and inclusion in decision-making. The compilation of materials found in this book will mean that countries and policy-makers will have a clearer, more consistent understanding of the issues raised by each SEC and what is required for the evaluation of them so that better informed decisions can be made regarding the inclusion of SECs in biotechnology regulation and decision-making.

This book is intended to be a resource for a broad audience, not just an audience that supports or opposes GM agriculture. The book focuses on agricultural GM plants and animals. Nevertheless, it can be expected that much of the learning will be relevant to other GMOs and sectors. The invited authors represent a spectrum of disciplines and jurisdictions, providing readers with a thorough discussion of relevant issues. It is our hope that the compilation of a volume containing this information will be a resource for all delegates participating in the Intergovernmental Committee meetings for the CPB. In addition, we hope that this information will be of value to policy-makers in the countries that will be formulating national and regional policy, as well as to industry and non-governmental organizations on these issues.

Of course, the production of this large undertaking required many hands and the authors are deeply appreciative of the contributions from the invited experts. Without their contributions, the content of the book would be a pale imitation of this highly insightful and knowledgeable compendium.

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