

Letters

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

The editorial staff of *California Agriculture* welcomes your letters, comments and suggestions. Please write to us at calag@ucop.edu or 1111 Franklin St., 6th fl., Oakland, CA 94607. Include your full name and address. Letters may be edited for space and clarity.

High-quality social analysis

I enjoyed reading "Horticultural biotechnology faces significant economic and market barriers," in April-June 2004 *California Agriculture*. Author Julian Alston deals with the behavior of people and their institutions in a way that is analogous to how I deal with plants' regulatory pathways. It is an interesting contrast in that among physiologists like me and many other plant scientists, the subject quickly becomes a blame-fest accusing various players of being stupid, dishonest, selfish or greedy. In contrast, the article approaches all of these people factors as behaving just as neutrally as plant pathways. They just do what they do, and these are the consequences. At the end, some reasonable predictions are made about which changes in the system would result in greater adoption of horticultural biotechnology.

How does one get biologists to apply their honed skills at unprejudiced analysis to human systems? Since this analysis is familiar in its scientific approach but differs in subject matter, it provides the best teaching tool I have seen for raising the quality of social analysis by biological scientists dealing with horticultural biotechnology.

Thomas Björkman
Associate Professor of Vegetable Crop Physiology
Cornell University
Biochemistry, UC Davis, 1980

Outstanding review

Thank you for publishing the outstanding review of horticultural biotechnology in your latest issue of *California Agriculture*. It is packed with well-written articles and useful information.

Daniel Pollak
California Research Bureau
Sacramento

Ecological risks ignored

I am appalled by your recent issue (April-June 2004) on biotechnology. There is not one article on the potential ecological risks of genetically modified organisms (GMOs). In my opinion this is a disservice to the farmers and consumers of California, as your magazine provides a one-sided view on an important issue. I challenge you to consider inviting a paper on the risks of this technology and the alternatives available.

Miguel A. Altieri
Professor of Agroecology
UC Berkeley



April-June 2004 issue

Editor's response: We are already at work on a special section devoted to the risks and benefits of agricultural biotechnology (see the Editor's note at the top of the first text page of the April-June 2004 issue). The peer-reviewed manuscripts of that issue examined the hurdles to horticultural biotechnology only. In our judgment, a careful examination of risks and benefits also merits a special section.

Correction on GE cotton in California

The photo caption on page 95 of the April-June 2004 issue mentions that Bt cotton is widely grown in California and elsewhere. The "elsewhere" part is indeed true, but Bt cotton is not grown to any great extent in California. We simply do not have most of the Lepidoptera pests in California cotton that Bt controls. Statewide, only 7,400 acres of Bt cotton were grown in California out of the 2003 total of 691,930 acres, primarily in the Imperial Valley for pink bollworm control. In the San Joaquin Valley where most of the cotton is grown, there is virtually no Bt cotton grown.

Pink bollworm is managed in the San Joaquin Valley by the Cooperative Pink Bollworm Program, which is funded almost entirely by cotton growers and operated by the California Department of Food and Agriculture. The program uses an integrated pest-control approach, relying on trapping, sterile release, crop destruction and occasional pheromone treatments to keep infestations below economic impact levels. There may be some acres of it grown because the Bt technology was combined — so called stacked — with glyphosate-resistant (Roundup Ready) cotton, which is very common and important in California, but if so it clearly is not grown because of the Bt trait.

Larry D. Godfrey
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