

BOOK REVIEWS

The Public, the Media and Agricultural Biotechnology. Edited by D. Brassard, J. Shanahan and T. C. Nesbitt. Wallingford, UK: CABI (2007), pp. 405, £75.00. ISBN 978184593. doi:10.1017/S0014479708006455

This book contains 16 chapters in three parts that cover public opinion about agricultural biotechnology around the world; theoretical perspectives and communication about agricultural biotechnology, and practical experiences in international settings.

Agricultural biotechnology and its acceptance by the public are both complex subjects. The book is a credible attempt to give readers an insight into public acceptance or rejection of the technology. It is timely since the debate will continue between scientists, regulatory authorities, policy makers, multinationals, NGOs, governments, farmers and consumers.

It is not surprising that certain themes are repeated in many of the chapters. However, to the uninitiated those dealing with the theories of opinion formulation are interesting. The issues around who we trust are complicated, especially when the values of certain pillars of the media establishment are currently being questioned. What is clear is the need for reliable authoritative information from credible sources, together with unbiased media reporting. Strong regulatory frameworks as well as consumer choice and therefore labelling are key.

The book does not provide unbiased, factual evidence on the benefits of the first generation products of this technology to farmers. It is likely that the debate will change as second generation products providing direct consumer benefits emerge.

This book will be of value not only to those directly involved in this powerful technology but also to those interested in the current debate.

Nigel W. Kerby

Agricultural Biotechnology and Intellectual Property: Seeds of Change. Edited by J. P. Kesan. Wallingford, UK: CAB International (2007), pp. 383, £75.00. ISBN 978-1-84593-201-5. doi:10.1017/S0014479708006467

CABI has added another important title to its impressive series on agricultural biotechnology. This book addresses the controversial and complex intersection of agbiotech and law, that includes the protection of intellectual property rights, the rights of farmers saving seeds, the patenting of life forms, public policy and the global debate on genetically modified organisms. The papers were presented at an international conference in 2004 and were edited to form chapters in this book. The three-year time gap between the conference and publication is evident in the references (no 2007 citations were spotted, a handful of 2006 papers, and maybe two dozen 2005 publications). One paper did not seem to have had the usual high level of CABI Publishing editing (it retains earmarks of a translation). Readers would have been better served by the inclusion of a section on acronyms and abbreviations, instead of putting some definitions in the index, and repeatedly defining them throughout the text. The book does meet the goal set out by its editor, J. P. Kesan, to create a valuable reference text for students and practitioners in intellectual property rights and agribusiness, and for lawyers and law students involved in intellectual property issues. The latter group will appreciate the inclusion of extensive references and lists of relevant cases. Also included is a section on comparative studies that includes three short country studies (Japan, Republic of Korea and Egypt), and a section on international regulation. The 35 contributors include lawyers, economists, agribusiness experts and biotechnologists, and the papers are admirably readable. This text has convincingly explored a difficult area, and the book should find a receptive international audience.

L. Reginald MacIntyre