

Building Agricultural Biotechnology in Connecticut

A Report of the CASE Task Force on Agricultural Biotechnology

Summary of Response

Connecticut leads New England in the value and diversity of agricultural products. Agriculture contributed \$0.8 billion and over 13,000 jobs to the state's economy in 1996. Contrary to the general belief that agriculture is diminishing in Connecticut, it has been diversifying and expanding steadily, even through the recent recession (tourism was the other). With the application of recently developed modern biology and biotechnology techniques, agriculture has the potential to play a major role in the economic revitalization of the state. To continue this forward movement, the industry MUST diversify and utilize agricultural biotechnology.

Connecticut has a broad and solid base of agricultural biotechnology research both in public and private universities, state research institutes, and private industries. While most of the "state-of-the-art" facilities and expertise are present in public and private universities and institutes for agricultural biotechnology research and development, more investments are required to bring these efforts to fruition. The resources for agricultural biotechnology research/product development and their actual productivity in the state's private sectors are very impressive. Companies such as Alexion Pharmaceutical, Inc., Pfizer Inc., DEKALB Genetics Corporation, Imperial Nurseries, Clinton Nursery, Prides Corner Farms, SPAFAS, Inc., Arbor Acres, and Tallmadge Brothers are actively involved in R&D and production of agricultural biotechnology products. However, the environment in the state could be improved for starting a new business in agricultural biotechnology.

To realize the economic potential of agricultural biotechnology expansion in the state, a series of implementation vehicles are recommended. These are:

- 1. Establish a "Connecticut Agricultural Information Clearinghouse"** -- an Internet site devoted to Connecticut agricultural biotechnology research, industry, and business, as well as other technologies;
- 2. Streamline Regulation and Permit Process** -- establish a "one stop shopping" procedure for starting firms in Connecticut, particularly to help agricultural biotechnology;
- 3. Establish Core Equipment Facilities** -- scientific equipment centers for use by both the research community and emerging biotechnology firms, particularly agricultural biotechnology;
- 4. Establish Low-Cost Incubator Space** -- inexpensive laboratory facilities neighboring "core equipment" centers for all types of start-up biotechnology firms;
- 5. Establish State-Sponsored Loan Program** -- deferred loans for joint ventures between Connecticut research institutions and emerging agricultural biotechnology firms;
- 6. Establish State Matching Fund Program** -- a fund to match grants, private, federal, and foreign, for developing the next generation of agricultural biotechnology; and
- 7. Strengthen Education Programs in Agricultural Biotechnology** -- streamline and strengthen education programs in high schools, community colleges, and universities in order to train students to meet the new challenge.

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