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## Ecuador

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### **Ecuadorian President Correa Outspoken on the Benefits and Potential of Genetically Modified (GM) Crops**

**Report Categories:**

Biotechnology - GE Plants and Animals

**Approved By:**

Emiko Purdy

**Prepared By:**

Henry Vega and Ann Murphy

**Report Highlights:**

President Rafael Correa strongly opposed what he called opposition to genetic engineering by "fundamentalists who are afraid of the truth." He insists that it was a "big mistake" to include the GM issue in the Constitution. He has also pointed out that the Constitutional mandate is contradictory as it prohibits the development and cultivation of GM crops while at the same time Ecuador imports GM foods including grains and soybean meal.

## **General Information:**

On September 1, 2012 [1], during his weekly Saturday Address, President Rafael Correa strongly opposed what he called opposition to genetic engineering by “fundamentalists who are afraid of the truth.” Upon defining what a transgenic organism is President Correa blamed then Constituent Assembly President Alberto Acosta for influencing lawmakers to include in the Constitution a declaration that Ecuador is a country free of transgenic. President Correa stated that he currently regrets what happened describing it as putting a lock on the Constitution. He reflected that at least the Constitution permits the introduction of genetically modified seeds in cases of national interest. In such instances the Office of the President, with approval by the National Assembly, can authorize GM seeds.

According to President Correa, the use and adoption of genetically engineered crops has to be regulated, and when there is proof that such food products do not affect human health they can be used. President Correa has repeatedly mentioned that transgenic crops can help Ecuadorian farmers get out of poverty and that in areas such as the highlands, particularly frost-prone, peasants could benefit from GM crop traits resistant to frost. President Correa suggested that frost-resistant varieties developed with genetic engineering would be a powerful tool to lift subsistence farmers from poverty and help their work under extreme conditions.

President Correa has favored the use of the precautionary principle while at the same time insisting that it was a “big mistake” to include the issue of GMOs in the Constitution. He has also pointed out that the Constitutional mandate is contradictory as it prohibits the development and cultivation of GM crops while at the same time Ecuador imports GM foods including grains and soybean meal from Argentina.

President Correa also explained that there are confusing arguments that need to be separated. One of the issues, he has said, is to discuss if transgenic crops are harmful or not to human health. A separate issue is that of the influence of multinational companies. He stated that under the current circumstances, Ecuador is indeed benefiting multinational companies as Ecuador does not produce locally and instead is importing GM crops adding that “we have fallen into the inconsistency of banning GM production while we do import it.”

Regarding the applications of genetic engineering in Ecuador, he mentioned that Ecuadorian public sector’s researchers are using Article 401 of Ecuador’s Constitution as a pretext not to do research on transgenic crops. He claimed that the Constitution does not prohibit biotechnology research but that what it does require is to regulate it. He added that being afraid of information is an outrage and he clarified that biotechnology research is not prohibited.

President Correa’s remarks concluded with the following requests:

1. That Ecuador’s National Secretariat of Higher Education, Science, Technology and Innovation SENESCYT clarify that that research on transgenic is not prohibited, that researchers need to be careful of course as with any research.
2. That SENESCYT leads the academic scientific coordination for public policies on GMOs.
3. To start a national debate to define scientifically if GM foods are dangerous to health or not, and then find a way to adapt policies to the Constitutional mandate.

On September 26, 2012 President Rafael Correa [2], during an interview with former CNN anchor Jorge Gestoso, further elaborated his positions on GM foods. In addition to his comments during his September 1 address, President Correa implied that GM crops, by increasing yields for small Andean farmers, would tackle the social problem of migration to urban centers. He reiterated that "we made a mistake in the Constitution to declare under section 401 that Ecuador is a country free of transgenic crops and seeds." Referring to the recent Séralini et al. study, President Correa indicated that what if a "French institute says today that GM corn is bad, but later on another institute says that GM soy is good and Ecuador cannot produce it while Ecuador can import it; then the country is falling into an absurd contradiction."

When asked directly if he agrees with the production of GM crops, President Correa answered that he agrees as long as it is certain that they are safe for human health while he would not agree if the debate is not conclusive. In addition, he reiterated that under either scenario he does not agree with the Constitutional ban.

[1] **Enlace Ciudadano No. 287**, aired on September 1, 2012, available at:  
[http://www.elciudadano.gob.ec/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=35269:enlace-ciudadano-nro-287-desde-nayon-pichincha&catid=43:enlaces-ciudadanos-todos&Itemid=67](http://www.elciudadano.gob.ec/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=35269:enlace-ciudadano-nro-287-desde-nayon-pichincha&catid=43:enlaces-ciudadanos-todos&Itemid=67)

[2] **De Frente con Gestoso**, Interview with President Rafael Correa on GamaTv, aired on September 26, 2012, available at:  
[http://www.livestream.com/elciudadanowebtv/video?clipId=pla\\_55a96757-327f-4405-8127-f1d6047d25b9](http://www.livestream.com/elciudadanowebtv/video?clipId=pla_55a96757-327f-4405-8127-f1d6047d25b9)