

News Release

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Market Choices® Suspended by the U.S. Seed Industry

Alexandria, VA (October 20, 2008) – The American Seed Trade Association (ASTA) announced today the suspension of the grain marketing program and certification mark, Market Choices®, which will be phased out by the Fall of 2009. This decision comes as the trade of U.S. corn, corn gluten feed and distillers dried grains and solubles (DDGS) with the European Union (EU) has essentially stopped due to the lack of timely regulatory approvals for corn biotech traits. Although the U.S. has seen continued rapid development and adoption of these traits over the last 13 years, the regulatory approvals for grain and other feed products derived from this technology to enter the EU has lagged significantly behind U.S. and global approvals. A zero tolerance for traits not fully approved in the EU has made importation of U.S. corn and derived products virtually impossible since 2007.

The Market Choices® certification mark was established in 2002 to help growers and grain handlers identify non-EU approved corn hybrids. When biotechnology crops were first introduced, corn producers were faced with new choices when selecting corn hybrids best suited for their operation. The Market Choices® certification mark has been used industry-wide to help growers easily identify corn hybrids with enhanced traits, fully approved for food and feed use in the U.S., Canada and Japan, but not yet approved in the EU. As a result, Market Choices® serves as a tool for growers to identify these hybrids and segregate the grain away from the EU export market.

Representatives of the European agricultural industry have requested the European Commission allow a tolerance for biotechnology traits not yet approved in Europe but approved in the country of origin. The Commission and EU Member States failed to agree on the adoption of a tolerance at the most recent meeting of the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health at the end of September.

"Discussions have been held in the EU seeking an allowable tolerance for biotech traits approved in the U.S. but not in the EU to facilitate trade, but there is no indication that such a tolerance, if granted, would be at a commercially viable level for exports to continue from the United States," commented ASTA President and CEO Andy LaVigne. "Most importantly, the EU regulatory system continues to be unpredictable with respect to the review and approval of biotechnology products, which negatively impacts Europe's feed and livestock industries, growers, and ultimately consumers.

ASTA has worked over the last year with its members and stakeholders in the agricultural value chain to evaluate the future of the Market Choices® certification mark. "We reviewed the effectiveness, usefulness and value of the certification mark. After careful consideration, ASTA decided to suspend the use of the Market Choices® certification mark and program over the next year," said LaVigne. "However, the seed industry will continue to assist stakeholders by providing information regarding regulatory approval of biotech events in export markets to growers through the National Corn Growers Association and their related program, *Know Before You Grow*."

ASTA stresses the importance of finding an approved market for grain derived from biotech products.

LaVigne also noted that if the EC should provide for a commercially viable tolerance or demonstrate a functioning regulatory system for the approval of biotech events, ASTA would evaluate reestablishing the use of the Market Choices® certification mark and the related program with any appropriate adjustments needed to make the program effective.

ASTA promotes the development of better seed to produce better crops for a better quality of life. Founded in 1883, ASTA, located in Alexandria, Va., is one of the oldest trade organizations in the United States. Its membership consists of approximately 750 companies involved in seed production and distribution, plant breeding, and related industries in North America. As an authority on plant germplasm, ASTA advocates science and policy issues of industry importance. Its mission is to enhance the development and free movement of quality seed worldwide.

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