

Biotechnology into Practice and its Impact in Japan

Toshiomi Yoshida

President, Society of Bioscience and Bioengineering, Japan

Japanese Government set up a special policy to strengthen the utilization of biotechnology adopting “ a basic policy for creation of biotechnology industry”, an agreement by 5 Cabinet ministers, from the Science and Technology Agency, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, the Ministry of Health and Welfare, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (January 29, 1999). As to the basic strategy, biotechnology was characterized as one of the most important technologies to provide a quality job-market and new business opportunities though serious patent competition for a limited number of industrially useful genes are expected, and the commercialization should be materialized very quickly after a certain works of research and development. The main measures adopted by the government are 1) establishment of the foundation for creation of industries, 2) promotion of technology development and intensification of the aid for industrialization, 3) preparation of the environment favorable for biotechnology, and 4) promotion of public understanding. The governmental agencies concerned, their affiliated organizations and other relevant corps have conducted necessary works for actualization of the policy.

The Society of Bioscience and Bioengineering, Japan has actively engaged in the reinforcement of the linkage between academic and private sectors and popularization of biotechnology to bring the general public to understand biotechnology. Some works have been conducted collaboratively with the Kinki Bioindustry Promotion Council, Japan Bioindustry Association and other agencies. The issue of GMO acceptance has been in turmoil of hot debate in the public. Usage of GM products is currently going to be wavered and some companies were reconciled themselves to the shift to the usage of non-GM products in order to keep the problem away. The trade of GMOs is getting into a very serious international dispute as well.

The government policies, implementation of them by various governmental and related agencies, strategic researches, the response of publics and various relevant movements in Japan will be presented, and future prospects will be discussed.