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The State of Food and Agriculture 2003–04 explores the potential of agricultural biotechnology – especially transgenic crops – to meet the needs of the poor. It is found that agricultural biotechnology can help the poor by reducing reliance on toxic agricultural chemicals, lowering production costs for farmers, enhancing the nutritional content of foods and improving the control of plant and animal diseases. These gains can boost agricultural productivity and reduce food prices, but the benefits may not reach the poor. The report also presents an analysis of the socio-economic impacts of technological change in agriculture and surveys the current evidence regarding the safety of transgenic crops for human health and the environment. It recommends targeted investments in agricultural research, extension and regulatory capacity to ensure that the potential of agricultural biotechnology is brought to bear on the needs of the poor.

Included in this issue is the SOFA 2003–04 CD ROM, containing time series data for 150 countries and regions in English, French and Spanish, together with FAOSTAT software for data access and use.