

FAO electronic conference on biotechnology and genetic resources held in June 2005

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This issue is dedicated to publish the FAO electronic Conference ran from 6 June to 3 July on The role of biotechnology for the characterization and conservation of Genetic Resources. Follows an introduction and a link to the whole messages.

Introduction by John Ruane, Biotechnology FAO Forum Administrator

In March 2000, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) established the FAO Biotechnology Forum (<http://www.fao.org/biotech/forum.asp>) in 2000 with the aim of providing quality balanced information on agricultural biotechnology in developing countries and to make a neutral platform available for people to exchange views and experiences on this subject. Thirteen moderated e-mail conferences have been hosted by the Forum so far. The first six e-mail conferences, held in 2000-2001, lasted on average 9 weeks. Conferences held from 2002 onwards have been shorter, lasting 4-5 weeks, and 350-650 people have subscribed to each one. In the conferences held so far, over 1100 e-mails have been posted, coming roughly 50:50 from people living in developed and developing countries.

Conference 13 of the Forum ran from 6 June to 3 July 2005 and was entitled "The role of biotechnology for the characterisation and conservation of crop, forest, animal and fishery genetic resources in developing countries". The conference, as usual, was open to everyone and was moderated. About 650 people subscribed and 127 messages were posted, from people in 38 different countries. Over 60% of messages were from people living in developing countries. Prior to the conference, a 16-page background Document (<http://www.fao.org/biotech/C13doc.htm>) was sent by e-mail to all Forum members (ca. 3,000 people). The document gave an overview of the current status of genetic resources in the different food and agricultural sectors; a description of relevant biotechnologies (such as molecular markers, cryopreservation and reproductive technologies); and a discussion of some potential factors that may influence applications of biotechnology in developing countries in this area.

Discussions in the conference covered a wide range of issues relevant to the different food and agricultural sectors i.e. crops, livestock, fishery and forestry. Of the biotechnologies discussed, most focus was on molecular markers with much less emphasis on cryopreservation or in vitro culture. The kinds of issues raised in the conference were the: * Potential role or value that markers have for prioritising populations for conservation purposes (compared to other factors, such as phenotypic data), * Potential role or value that markers have for characterising different populations e.g. fish stocks * Advantages and disadvantages of different marker systems, plus which marker systems are best adapted to developing countries * Potential importance of DNA banks versus seed banks * International collaboration and capacity building * low cost options for tissue culture

All the 127 messages posted will remain on the Forum website for people to read in the future, at <http://www.fao.org/biotech/logs/c13logs.htm> or, with all messages in a single webpage, at <http://www.fao.org/biotech/logs/C13/allmessages.htm>

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