

Statement of the Alliance of International Agricultural Research Centres of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR)

Agenda item 6.3: Micro-organisms and insects

Wednesday, June 13, 2007

Mr/Madam Chair, on behalf of the fifteen IARCs of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), I thank you once again for providing the CG Centres with the opportunity to address this meeting.

The Genetic Resources Policy Committee of the CGIAR commissioned a paper which was only very recently – last week, in fact - included as an information document on the Commission's web site for this meeting. The paper is entitled 'Technical issues relating to Agricultural Microbial Genetic Resources (AMiGRs), including their characteristics, utilization, preservation and distribution.'

Of course time does not allow me to provide a summary of the paper. However, I would like to draw the Committee's attention to the most salient conclusions emphasized by the Genetic Resources Policy Committee.

1. It is possible to develop a working definition of agricultural microbial genetic resources (AMiGR) on the basis of the function for which those resources are used, i.e. the fact that they assist in the production of plants or animals, either directly or indirectly, in agricultural settings.
2. Because of a combination of factors concerning microbes used in agriculture - for example, their deployment in open environments; their extremely fast rates of reproduction and variation; their small size and portability; and historical patterns of use and distribution - it is difficult, and often impossible, to subject them to legal forms of control or appropriation. A large number of patents, however, have been granted in some countries over microbes as well as genes and proteins derived therefrom.
3. AMiGR are potentially extremely important for the sustainable improvement of productivity in developing countries, subject to biosafety considerations. However, they are as yet not widely exploited in a systematic manner in developing countries.
4. One possible way to increase the availability to, and use of AMiGRs by, developing countries would be to develop a 'virtual' core collection of screened materials currently held by public organizations around the world that wanted to participate. A critical aspect of this enterprise would be to agree upon harmonized terms and conditions for the distribution of those materials, in conformity with international law. The process for considering the establishment of such a base collection and the terms and conditions for its use would need to be highly participatory, with costs, legal status, partners, administrative responsibilities and other issues identified and exhaustively considered.

Mr/Madam Chair, I hope that the paper and these conclusions in particular will be useful to the ongoing considerations of this Commission.