

Advanced Workshop on Regional Capacity Building for GMOs Detection and Bio-safety for Food and Agriculture 16-17 June 2010, Syria

While the conventional uses of biotechnology are widely accepted, the modern forms especially the genetically modified organisms (GMOs) have become the target of a very intensive and the most eagerly discussed research areas in public and, at times, emotionally charged debate. Bio-safety regulations are in place in many countries to ensure the safe use and development of gene technology and to prevent and avert any potential harm to human health, animals, property or the environment that may be caused by the use of GMOs, where the risks of every new GM plant, animal or microorganism are analyzed on the case-by-case basis. Issues related to the introduction and application of GMOs in the Arab and developing countries is considered of utmost importance. Therefore, strengthening the capacities in GMOs detection is considered of high priority.

In this context, the Advanced Workshop on Regional Capacity Building for Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) Detection and Bio-safety for Food and Agriculture was held from 16-17 June 2010 at the General Commission for Scientific Agricultural Research (GCSAR) in Damascus, Syria, and organized by FAO, GCSAR, and ICARDA. The workshop aimed to discuss the recent applications of modern biotechnology and its importance for food security, the recent bio-safety regulations and related issues, and methods for detection and quantification of GMOs. More than 100 participants representing AARINENA, ICARDA, FAO, biotechnology scientists and researchers coming from Jordan, Lebanon, Sudan, Syria, UAE, and Yemen were attended the workshop.

The workshop deliberations focused on three major lines: Modern biotechnology, Importance and applications; Bio-safety regulations and related issues; and Methods for detection and quantification of GMOs. Key themes highlighted including role of FAO on agricultural biotechnology: policies and priorities; results of the Benchmark Study of the FAO Project on opportunities for biotechnology and bio-safety applications in the NENA region; activities of the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (ICGEB) for capacity building in bio-safety; status of collaboration networking and prospective of biotechnology and bio-safety in Syria.



Participants of Advanced Workshop on Regional Capacity Building for GMOs Detection and Bio-safety for Food and Agriculture, 16-17 June 2010, Syria

Dr. Osama Momtaz, Coordinator of AARINENA Agricultural Biotechnology Network presented role of the network in setting the platform for regional coordination for detection of GMO's and bio-safety regulation and measures in WANA region. . He highlighted the global crop problems, where biotechnology can complement, and addressed constrains to sustainable agricultural development in WANA region. He

also listed constraints facing biotechnology in WANA region that including little integration of biotechnology in national policy framework, important local crops and small holder farmer problems not addressed, limited in public resources and investments, tools for technology transfer inadequate and often inaccessible. He stated that GMOs impact for the first decade 1996-2006, exceeded 100 million hectares, 10 million farmers planted Biotechnological crops with economic benefit US\$ 27 billion. He underlined the biotechnology and bio-safety policies, and reviewed the current status of National Bio-safety Frameworks in WANA, where 11 Countries have completed their NBF under UNEP-GEF projects, and two countries developing NBFs without GEF support. The proposed measures include awareness campaign, designate relevant data and institutions for coordinating climate change research, development of research capacity, allocation more funds, innovations in faster growing, drought and salt tolerant crops. Dr. Ahmed Abdul Kader, Bio-safety working group leader, AARINENA Agriculture Biotechnology Network presented the world measures in sampling and standardization protocol for GMO detection.

The participants discussed and recommended to establish a national network containing a filed database for the benefits of researchers and institutions; facilitate the collaborative work in different research phases; connect with the established AARINENA Agriculture Biotechnology Network, as well as with databases of international organization.