



Biotechnology Update

Internal Co-ordination Group for Biotechnology (ICGB)

No. 10, 1 November 2001

Introduction

OECD Biotechnology Update is a newsletter, which is published approximately every six months. Its purpose is to provide information on the diverse activities at OECD related to biotechnology. It is mainly intended for delegates to OECD meetings who already know something of its work. But we hope that it is also useful to the wider biotech community.

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THE INTERNAL CO-ORDINATION GROUP FOR BIOTECHNOLOGY (ICGB)

OECD has been undertaking work on biotechnology-related projects – including safety issues – since 1982.

In the meantime, biotechnology has had an increasing impact on the programmes of different sectors such as: agriculture; science, technology, and industry; environment; and trade. So in 1993, an Internal Co-ordination Group on Biotechnology (ICGB) was established to facilitate internal co-ordination among these sectors. The ICGB is playing a critical role in co-ordinating OECD's response to the G8.

Michael Osborne, the Deputy Director for Science Technology and Industry, chairs the ICGB. Peter Kearns is the Secretary.

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CONFERENCE ON NEW BIOTECHNOLOGY FOODS AND CROPS: SCIENCE, SAFETY & SOCIETY

A conference on New Biotechnology Foods and Crops: Science, Safety & Society, was held in Bangkok, 10 – 12 July 2001. This Conference was organised jointly by the OECD and the government of the UK.

The Conference brought together some 250 participants from more than 50 countries, including scientists, government regulators and representatives from industry, academia and civil society. Speakers also represented each of these sectors. Amongst other things, the conference

concluded with the recommendation that all stakeholders commit to greater transparency on genetically modified organisms and that governments increase their support for independent and publicly funded scientific research into the risks and benefits of genetically-modified foods and crops.

The Conference web site includes the Summary of the Chairman, Lord Selborne, together with the report from the Conference Rapporteurs. It also includes the presentations given at the Conference, both in written form, as well as a webcast. All of this information can be found at: <http://www1.oecd.org/bangkok/>



LMOS AND THE ENVIRONMENT: AN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

27-30 November 2001

Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina

The objective of the Conference is to bring together a diverse group of participants for a constructive dialogue on the underlying science for assessing transgenic organisms in the environment. The emphasis will be on transgenic crops because these are the most common applications at the current time. However, other applications will also be considered, such as the use of transgenic trees in forestry, fish in aquaculture, and organisms used in bioremediation. The conference will promote a dialogue between developed and developing countries in order to identify unique assessment needs and experiences of different countries and regions.

Web site: LMOs and the Environment
www1.oecd.org/ehs/raleigh/index.htm

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HARMONIZATION OF REGULATORY OVERSIGHT IN BIOTECHNOLOGY

At the 10th Meeting of the Working Group, held in Paris, 27-29 June 2001, it was agreed that a questionnaire on the monitoring/detection/identification of products/organisms produced through biotechnology would be developed, in

consultation with the Bureau. The final report is expected to be completed by the end of 2001 and presented at the 11th Meeting of the Working Group (14-16 January 2002).

Discussions continue on the development of an effective Unique Identifier for biotech products that are or will be approved in member countries. This issue will be discussed further, at the upcoming 11th Session.

The Working Group continues to develop its consensus documents that include technical information used in the regulatory review of biotechnology products. The information used in these documents is mutually acceptable among OECD Member countries. Upcoming publications are indicated below.

Future events:

- ◆ LMOs and the Environment, An International Conference, Sheraton Imperial Hotel, Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina, 27-30 November 2001.
- ◆ 11th Meeting of the Working Group for the Harmonisation of Regulatory Oversight in Biotechnology, Paris, 14-16 January 2001

Upcoming publications:

- 📖 *Consensus Document on Biology of Pinus Strobus L. (Eastern White Pine)*
- 📖 *Consensus Document on the Biology of Picea Sitchensis (Bong.) Carr. (Sitka Spruce)*
- 📖 *Report of the Workshop on the Environmental Considerations of Genetically Modified Trees*
- 📖 *Consensus Document on Information Used in the Assessment of Environmental Applications Involving Baculoviruses*
- 📖 *Module II: Glufosinate Ammonium (Phosphinothricin) metabolite and residue situation in genetically modified glufosinate-tolerant plants*

Web site: BioTrack Online
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SAFETY OF NOVEL FOODS AND FEEDS

As noted in the 9th issue of this newsletter, a workshop on the Nutritional Assessment of Novel Foods and Feeds, was held in Ottawa, Canada from 5-7 February 2001. The workshop included 79 participants from 19 countries, the European Commission, the FAO, OECD's Business and Industry Advisory Committee (BIAC) and the International Association of Consumer Food Organisations (IACFO). The objective of this workshop was to discuss aspects related to the nutritional assessment of novel foods and feeds. The Task Force subsequently congratulated Canada's initiative for hosting this event.

At the 4th Meeting of the Task Force, held in Paris on 21 – 23 May 2001, the Codex Alimentarius Secretariat reported progress made by the 2nd Session of the Codex Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Task Force on Foods Derived from Biotechnology. Draft guidelines made reference to the OECD's consensus documents as tools for compositional analysis of key components.

Also at this meeting, the Task Force decided to establish a new project on capacity building, with the assistance of Russia. This project would develop a training programme on the safety and risk assessment of agriculture-related, genetically modified organisms.

For inclusion with a questionnaire on biomarkers and new techniques, the Task Force adopted a proposal to include questions on post-market surveillance. The survey will be distributed prior to the 5th meeting of the Task Force (10-12 December 2001).

In addition, the Task Force continues to advance its work regarding the safety/risk assessment of animal feed stuffs derived from genetically modified plants.

The Task Force is also continuing its work on consensus documents, which are complementary to those of the Working Group, and which identify the critical nutrients and critical toxicants associated with major crop plants. The first two consensus documents, one on soybean and the other on canola/oilseed rape, are being published shortly.

Future event:

- ◆ 5th Meeting of the Task Force for the Safety of Novel Foods and Feeds, Paris, 10-12 December 2001

Recent publications:

- 📖 *Consensus Document on Key Nutrients and Key Toxicants in Low Erucic Acid Rapeseed*
- 📖 *Consensus Document on Compositional Considerations for New Varieties of Soybean: Key Food and Feed Nutrients and Antinutrients*

Upcoming publication:

- 📖 *Report of the OECD Workshop on Nutritional Assessment of Novel Foods and Feeds*

Web site: BioTrack Online
<http://www.oecd.org/ehs/service.htm>

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**OECD'S SEED CERTIFICATION AND
 FOREST REPRODUCTIVE MATERIAL
 CONTROL SCHEMES**

Three criteria - distinctness, uniformity and stability - are the basis for identifying crop seed varieties and constitute the backbone of seed development and commercialisation. Reliability of forest reproductive material rests upon local identification, selection and breeding work. Genetic purity is a component of the sustainability issue, especially when hybridisation and genetic modifications are involved.

The **OECD Schemes for Seed Certification** have developed since the late 1950s to regulate international trade as well as counter season multiplication of seed between the northern and southern hemispheres. They are implemented by a total of forty-eight member and non-member countries across all continents, and four new countries should be admitted by the end of the year 2001. Their essential purpose is to harmonise the

assessment and certification of identity and purity of cultivars (cultivated crop plant varieties). Most species, including all basic staples, are eligible and varieties from all participating countries appear on the annually published *OECD List of Varieties Eligible for Certification*. Current issues in discussion are, among others, the quality and monitoring of seed control and the handling of the accidental presence of GMOs in non-GM seed varieties. A Working Group on Genetically Modified Seed Issues was established at the 2000 Annual Meeting of National Designated Authorities.

A new **OECD Scheme for the Certification of Forest Reproductive Material** is being introduced.

Future event:

- ◆ Annual Meeting of National Designated Authorities and meetings of the Working Groups on GM Seed Issues and Accreditation, Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, 25-29 June 2002.

Web site: Web site <http://www.oecd.org/agr/code/>

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**AGRICULTURE COOPERATIVE RESEARCH
 PROGRAMME**

In recognition of the great importance of agriculture as an aspect of sustainable development, 27 OECD Member countries have agreed to participate in a co-operative research programme on biological resource management for sustainable agricultural systems. A new five-year programme (2000-2004) was established on 1 January 2000. The programme's aim is to intensify fundamental research in biotechnology, with new emphasis on research integrating socio-economic and scientific concerns as well as risk assessment. It seeks to reinforce international scientific co-operation and to facilitate the exchange of information on current research, in particular that of value to developing countries. The themes of the current Programme are:

- New agricultural products for sustainable farming and industry;
- Quality of animal products and safety of food;

- Enhancing environmental quality in agricultural systems; and
- Connecting scientific progress to sustainable and integrated agro-food systems.

Two types of activities are promoted by the Programme:

- **Fellowships** to encourage exchange between scientists interested in the research themes (117 applications were received for the year 2001, and 64 scientists were awarded a fellowship) Information and application forms are posted on Internet: <http://www.oecd.org/agr/prog/> . The new deadline for submitting fellowship applications has been set for 31 October 2001 (for departures in 2002).
- **Grants for Workshops:** Information on how to apply and proceedings of previous workshops are available on the web site below. Six workshops, were held in 2001 in Belgium, France, Germany, Holland, Hungary, and Spain, who received subsidies from the Programme. There are no deadlines for submitting applications for sponsorship , however, it is advisable to send applications for sponsorship at least one year before meetings are scheduled to take place.

Web site: <http://www.oecd.org/agr/prog/>


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MODERN BIOTECHNOLOGY AND AGRICULTURAL MARKETS

The report *Modern Biotechnology and Agricultural Markets: A Discussion of Selected Issues*, prepared by the Directorate for Food, Agriculture and Fisheries, synthesises the main economic issues on both the supply and demand side arising from the use of modern agricultural biotechnology in agriculture.

Impacts of biotech crops on agricultural markets and trade continue to be part of the ongoing analysis for the agricultural outlook process. An analysis of the impacts of biotech crops on trade and international markets is to be presented to the working group on commodities in spring 2002.

Recent Publications:

 *Modern Biotechnology and Agricultural Markets: A Discussion of selected Issues*
Available for free at: http://www.oecd.org/under_biotechnology/biological_resources_and_agriculture

 OECD (2000), *OECD Agricultural Outlook 2000-2005 and OECD Agricultural Outlook 2001-2006*

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GLOBAL FORUM ON AGRICULTURE

At the OECD April 2001 Global Forum on Agriculture, the Secretariat presented the results of its analysis of the impact that non-tariff measures (NTMs) have on developing, emerging and transition economies (DETEs). The Secretariat's study is contained in the recently published 2001 edition of *Agricultural Policies in Emerging and Transition Economies*. A key finding of this study is that NTMs pose an increasing obstacle to the export opportunities of DETEs, and that these countries often face difficult choices in deciding whether the appropriate response should be to boost efforts at compliance or to contest the validity of a given measure at the WTO. In this context, there was considerable discussion of how measurement of the economic impacts of NTMs might be improved. The need for technical assistance and investment to enhance DETEs' capacity to compete in export markets was emphasized.

Participants at the Forum included national experts in the area of international trade, drawn from government ministries and independent research bodies in both OECD countries and non-Member Economies. In addition, there were presentations from UN-FAO, Office Internationale des Epizooties (OIE) and International Service for National Agricultural Research (ISNAR). The OIE highlighted its role in setting standards, which provide a basis for harmonization under the SPS Agreement. This furnished context for the ensuing discussion of the circumstances under which SPS measures may constitute an unjustified trade barrier. The representative from ISNAR focused on the role for public research, as well as institution and capacity building. The Forum subsequently discussed the respective roles of the public and

private sectors in ensuring efficient resource allocations, and the trade implications of intellectual property protection for GMO technologies.

Analysis will continue under OECD's broader work programme on non-tariff measures.

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INCENTIVE MEASURES

The OECD Working Group on Economic Aspects of Biodiversity (WGEAB), a subsidiary body of the Environmental Policy Committee, is finalising its current mandate. A compendium of valuation studies on biodiversity benefits was recently published and by the end of 2001, a handbook on valuation of biodiversity and a study on market creation for biodiversity products and services are scheduled to be completed. This forms part of WGEAB's contribution to the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD) in its work on Incentive Measures (article 11).

The compendium includes a number of studies from internationally known experts in the field, involving both traditional and novel approaches. Based in part on nine OECD country case studies, the handbook provides an in-depth discussion on biodiversity values and reviews all major valuation methods. It focuses on valuation use on policy making and incentive design.

Finally, in collaboration with the World Bank Institute (WBI), the study on market creation analyses when markets can be used most effectively to promote biodiversity conservation and sustainable use. It illustrates the conceptual analysis with over 20 case studies, which are being placed on the Internet for free downloading. A series of regional training seminars on incentive measures are being planned for the first half of 2002, prior to the CBD's Conference of the Parties (COP6) in collaboration with host countries and partner institutions.

WGEAB also works on access and benefit sharing of genetic resources (ABS). As such, it is completing a detailed analysis of the economic aspects of ABS and their legal ramifications.

Future events:

- ◆ Regional training seminars in West Africa and Mexico (February / March 2002)
- ◆ 14th Meeting of the Working Group on Economic Aspects of Biodiversity, Paris, 16-17 May 2002

Recent publications:

- 📖 *Valuation of Biodiversity Benefits: Selected Studies (2001)*
- 📖 *Handbook of Incentive Measures for Biodiversity: Design and Implementation (1999)*
- 📖 *Saving Biological Diversity: Economic Incentives (1996)*
- 📖 *Economic Issues in Benefit Sharing: Concepts and Practical Experiences [ENV/EPOC/GEEI/BIO(98)7/FINAL]*
- 📖 *Issues in the Sharing of Benefits Arising out of the Utilisation of Genetic Resources [OCDE/GD(97)193]*

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BIOTECHNOLOGY FOR SUSTAINABLE INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT

The Task Force on Biotechnology for Sustainable Industrial Development, guided by Canada and with policy and financial support from other Members, held its fifth meeting in Paris on 21-22 May 2001. The Task Force has focussed as its last phase of work to draw together documented evidence of the use of biotechnology in sustainable industrial development. The Task Force collected and analysed available case studies and brought them together in a new report, *The Application of Biotechnology to Industrial Sustainability*, which will be published early November 2001.

The report, consisting of 21 cases from a range of industrial sectors and countries, reveals that biotechnology does not necessarily always offer the single best route; sometimes, it may be most effectively used as one of a series of tools or integrated into other processes. Nevertheless, the application of biotechnology invariably led to a reduction in operation and/or capital costs. In each case, the biotechnological step led to a more sustainable process and a generally lowered ecological footprint by reducing raw material and


energy inputs, and waste. Thus, the report clearly demonstrates the benefits brought by the use of biotechnology in sustainable industrial processes.

The Task Force continues to seek how to realise a more bio-based global economy through the development of sustainable bioproducts that are renewable and bioprocesses that are eco-efficient. The Task Force experts will meet together in February 2002 in order to debate further on its future direction and to propose a next work plan to the Working Party.


Future event:

- ◆ The Sixth meeting of the Task Force will be held in Seville on 20 February 2002.

Recent publication:

 *The OECD Observer*, Sustainable Planet, No.226/227, OECD, 2001

Forthcoming publication:

 *The Application of Biotechnology to Industrial Sustainability*, OECD 2001

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BIOLOGICAL RESOURCE CENTRES

Biological Resource Centres (BRCs) are an indispensable underpinning of the life sciences and biotechnology. They consist of culturable and other viable organisms and living cells (microbial, plant, animal and human), parts thereof, genetic and other data-bases, and bioinformatics tools.

A final report "*Biological Resource Centers: Underpinning the Future of Life Sciences and Biotechnology*" has been published and can be downloaded from our web site: <http://www.oecd.org/biotechnology/> – under the theme "Scientific, Industrial and Health Applications of Biotechnology". It is accompanied by a background report on current status, activities and the future of existing BRCs. The main report stresses, amongst other things, the responsibility of policy makers to recognise the opportunities and challenges facing BRCs in the 21st century and to ensure their long-term survival. One of the main policy

recommendations is the creation of a global BRC network, which would allow BRCs to link up internationally and exchange both materials and data in accordance with agreed principles, which need to be developed. A global network would allow institutions and countries to avoid duplication of efforts and economise resources. A follow-up activity was approved by the Working Party and a new Task Force was created with an initiative of France. The mandate of the new Task Force is to implement the recommendations of the report. Some experts of BRCs from OECD non-member countries will be invited to the Task Force meeting.

Future event:

- ◆ Expert Group meeting on BRCs will be held in Paris on 19-20 November 2001.

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XENOTRANSPLANTATION

Xenotransplantation is about the transplantation of organs, tissues or viable cells from one species to another - in particular, from animals to humans. As such, it is yet another example of scientific progress confronting society with a controversial and emotionally charged issue that is in need of a coherent policy framework.





A Consultation was held in Paris at OECD Headquarters on 4-6 October 2000 and was attended by over 60 participants from around the world, representing countries currently hosting xenotransplantation clinical trials; countries not actively engaged in xenotransplantation research but interested in its potential public health impact; and relevant international bodies such as the Council of Europe and the European Commission.

The consultation brought together some 60 participants from countries currently hosting xenotransplantation clinical trials, engaged in xenotransplantation research and others who have banned the use of the technology but are aware of its global implications.

A report has been published which summarises the topics, issues and considerations discussed at the OECD/WHO Consultation on Xenotransplantation

Surveillance and can be downloaded from our web site: <http://www.oecd.org/biotechnology/> – under the theme “Scientific, Industrial and Health Applications of Biotechnology”.

Recent publications:

-  *Xenotransplantation: International Policy Issues*, OECD 1999
-  *The OECD Observer*, “Challenges in Tissue Transplantation”, No 213, OECD 1998
-  Plans drawn up for xenotransplantation watchdog Source: *Nature* ; 12 October 2000, vol.407, pp.666
-  <http://www.oecd.org/media/release/nw00-104a.htm>- News Release

Web site:

<http://www.oecd.org/biotechnology/> - under the theme “Scientific, Industrial and Health Applications of Biotechnology”

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SAFE DRINKING WATER

The need to achieve a better understanding of water’s role in the transmission of infectious disease was officially acknowledged by the international community in 1996 at the OECD Workshop on Biotechnology for Water Use and Conservation in Cocoyoc, Mexico. Then, in 1998, the OECD Interlaken Workshop on Molecular Technologies for Safe Drinking Water reviewed the effectiveness of drinking water plants in preventing the passage of microbial contaminants and the reliability of current indicators as means to guarantee microbiologically safe water to consumers. Recommendations from that workshop highlighted the need for better approaches and methods to assess the safety of drinking water and to monitor and respond to adverse events.

This call was heeded by the Swiss Federal Institute for Environmental Science and Technology (EAWAG), which launched in 1999 an initiative to develop a guidance document to address such global needs, in co-operation with the OECD and the WHO. In addition, the UK Government hosted, in July 2000, an OECD expert group meeting, “Approaches for Establishing Links between Drinking Water and Infectious Disease”.

A policy report has been published which summarises the conclusions of the meeting held in the United Kingdom and can be downloaded from our web site : <http://www.oecd.org/biotechnology/> – under the theme “Scientific, Industrial and Health Applications of Biotechnology”

Web site:

<http://www.oecd.org/biotechnology/> - under the theme “Scientific, Industrial and Health Applications of Biotechnology”

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GENETIC TESTING

OECD ran a workshop “Genetic Testing: Policy Issues for the New Millennium” in Vienna, 23-25 February 2000. A number of key recommendations emerged and the Biotechnology Unit is taking forward three of these in current projects. These focus on the impacts of patent and licensing practices on access to innovations based on gene sequences (see project on Genetic Inventions, IPRs, and Licensing Practices), on privacy and security of genetic data, and on development of internationally recognised best practice guidelines for quality assurance of genetic services. A first steering group meeting to address the development of a Survey on Quality Assurance Measures and Proficiency Testing Schemes for Molecular Genetic Testing in OECD Countries met in London on 4 June 2001 and agreed the key parameters for the survey. In all, 28 attendees were present, including representatives from Austria, Belgium, Canada, Finland, Italy, Japan, Portugal, Spain, United Kingdom, European Commission. EuropaBio, BIAC and industry were represented. A pilot phase involving seven OECD countries is about to be launched.

A working group of delegates from the OECD’s Working Party on Biotechnology and the Working Party on Information Security and Privacy , comprising high level experts, has been established to study the challenges raised by the intersection of genomics and informatics. The group will review how well existing privacy and data security regulations and practices, including the OECD Privacy and Security Guidelines, can be applied to data from genetic testing. It will also consider the social dimensions of the processing of genomic data. The initial study will be carried out between

July and December 2001 through an electronic discussion group. An expert meeting is planned for mid-2002.

Recent publications:

- 📖 *Genetic Testing : Policy Issues for the New Millennium-* (2000) OECD- ISBN 92-64-18394-3
- 📖 *Genetic Testing: Policy Issues for the New Millennium.* J BioLaw & Busa. Vol 4, Number 3, 2001
- 📖 *OECD Workshop on Genetic Testing, Vienna (2000) – Community Genetics, Vol. 3, Number 4 (pp.157-228), 2001*

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AGEING

While undoubtedly one of the greatest accomplishments of the 20th Century, the increased longevity and lower fertility of OECD populations means that one quarter to one third of the working age population will be over sixty five by 2025. This ageing of OECD countries creates enormous social and health care challenges, especially since this segment of the population is most vulnerable to chronic illness and disability. Not surprisingly, countries are searching for ways to promote healthy ageing. What solutions can biotechnology offer?

A Workshop on Healthy Ageing and Biotechnology was held on 13-14 November 2000 in Tokyo, Japan. It assembled a cross disciplinary group of experts for a lively discussion on the impacts of biotechnology on the ageing process and the economics of elderly health care. Scientists identified the major opportunities being created by biotechnology in our understanding and ultimately our ability to slow the ageing process. Policymakers debated the research, regulatory, health care, and social choices countries must make now in order to ensure that efficient new technologies are affordable, equitable, and available.

Sponsored and generously supported by the Ministry of Health and Welfare of Japan, the workshop was organised by the Biotechnology Unit of the Directorate for Science Technology and Industry at the OECD with the co-operation of the

Directorate of Education, Employment, Labour and Social Affairs.

Conference proceedings as well as a summary of the Key Points and Policy Conclusions can be found on the workshop web site below. A volume of select papers is being compiled and edited by Dr. Marc Weksler and Dr. Hiroshi Yoshikura. A Summary Report of the meeting will be published over the course of the winter 2001-2002.

Web site:

<http://www.oecd.org/biotechnology/> - under the theme "Scientific, Industrial and Health Applications of Biotechnology"

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GENETIC INVENTIONS, IPRS, AND LICENSING PRACTICES

The products, techniques and data biotechnology generates, frequently test the boundaries of the intellectual property rights systems of OECD countries. Recently, there have been contentious debates about the granting of patents for genetic material (genes, DNA sequences, SNPs, ESTs, cDNA), as well as the subsequent licensing practices of the organisations that hold these patents.

Ethical debates aside, a number of concerns have been raised about the impact of the licensing practices for gene patents on the research environment, on the market dynamics for new product development, and on the clinical uptake of new tests and treatments. Unfortunately, governments are at a loss to evaluate the concerns raised because the cases remain anecdotal, and their frequency and impact are rarely documented.

The Working Party on Biotechnology launched a project on Genetic Inventions, IPRs and Licensing Practices in February 2001 with generous support from the German government. The first activity will be a workshop of experts to be held in Berlin on 24-25 January 2002. The experts will discuss what data, cases, and studies are available on the patenting and licensing practices of firms and research organisations related to gene-based invention. They will be asked if these sources of information can clarify whether the current system

of protection for gene based inventions is working to achieve desired social and economic goals.

There are a number of objectives to be met at the planned workshop. They include:

- to provide OECD member countries with a better understanding of the data available on licensing practices in gene based innovations;
- to document the benefits of gene patents as well as the concerns certain licensing practices have raised; and
- to discuss novel strategies – for example cross-licensing, consortia, patent pools, and model licensing agreements – which have been developed in response to the proliferation of gene-based patents.

The workshop will also articulate recommendations – to governments, firms, or funding agencies – about how gene-based inventions might best be used in the public interest.

The workshop will be limited to 80 participants due to space constraints. Following the workshop, the Rapporteur's Report will be published in early Summer 2002.

Web site:

<http://www.oecd.org/biotechnology/> - under the theme "Scientific, Industrial and Health Applications of Biotechnology"

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BIOTECHNOLOGY STATISTICS IN OECD MEMBER COUNTRIES

In May 2001, the OECD held a second ad hoc meeting on biotechnology statistics. Nineteen Member countries as well as the European Commission and BIAC participated in the National Experts on Science and Technology Indicators (NESTI) meeting. The main outcome from this meeting was that participants adopted a provisional single word definition and a list based definition of biotechnology, pending approval by the working party on Biotechnology which will meet in Paris on 5-6 November 2001.

Following on from the May 2001 NESTI ad-hoc meeting where a number of work items were agreed

to, the OECD will work with members of the NESTI ad hoc group on biotechnology statistics to:

- discuss and approve model surveys of biotechnology undertaken by R&D surveys as well as special biotechnology surveys
- review the definition of biotechnology based on the early pilot results
- discuss the adequacy of existing classification schemes (industry, product, trade, patents)
- discuss the draft of a survey module on biotechnology and society
- discuss user needs.

This work will then feed into a "framework" document that outlines various elements of measuring biotechnology.

The NESTI ad hoc group on biotechnology statistics is scheduled to meet 13-15 May 2002 in Finland.

In June 2001, the OECD published the Compendium of existing national statistics. The principal aim of the compendium is to highlight the types of biotechnology data that are currently available and to encourage the future collection of internationally comparable statistics on biotechnology. By presenting the range of indicators that can be produced from existing statistics, this compendium should serve as a useful contribution to the work of the ad hoc group on biotechnology statistics and as an instrument for identifying user needs. The compendium is located on the web along with other STI working papers at: <http://www.oecd.org/oecd/pages/home/displaygeneral/0,3380,EN-documents-notheme-1-no-10-no-0,FF.html>

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BIOLOGICAL INFORMATICS

The Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF) became operational on 1 March 2001. It had been endorsed by Science Ministers of the OECD member countries, based on a recommendation of the OECD Megascience Forum. GBIF is now an independent internationally-funded research organisation, open to all countries. Its goal is to link numerous and highly diverse biodiversity databases, with special emphasis on information about species. The results will be fully accessible to anyone via the internet (www.gbif.org). The GBIF

secretariat has been established in Copenhagen, and substantive work will begin before the end of the year.

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COOPERATION AMONGST INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS (IGOS)

In addition to OECD, there are a number of other Intergovernmental Organisations (IGOs) that have activities related to biotechnology and biosafety. A number of these organisations have recently formed an Inter-Agency Network for Safety in Biotechnology (IANB) with the aim of enhancing co-operation.

The Organisations that are currently participating in this exercise are: Consultative Group on International Research (CGIAR); the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD); International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (ICGEB); Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO); Office International des Epizooties (OIE); Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD); United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD); United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO); World Health Organization (WHO); and the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Recent publication:

 Newsletter of the Inter-Agency Network for Safety in Biotechnology

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FOOD SAFETY EVENT

OECD Meeting of Food Safety Regulators

At the request of the OECD Council, the Secretariat organised a meeting of food safety regulators, in the

margins of the Bangkok Conference on New Biotechnology foods and Crops on 12 July 2001, to address the wider issues of food safety. The purpose of the meeting was to provide an opportunity for an open exchange of views on issues related to food safety and on new developments in the respective approaches to food safety regulation in OECD countries. The reports of the Ad Hoc Group on Food Safety were used as background documents and Member countries were invited to provide updates where appropriate. Mr. Takashi Shinohara, Director General, Policy Research Institute, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries (Japan) chaired the meeting. Twenty OECD Member countries, as well as representatives from the FAO, WHO, Codex, OIE and the Russian Federation participated in the discussion. This informal meeting did not involve decisions or lead to an official OECD statement.

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FUTURE EVENTS

- ◆ 12th Meeting of the Working Group on Human-Health-Related Biotechnologies, IEA, Paris, 5 November 2001
- ◆ 11th Meeting of the Working Party on Biotechnology, IEA, Paris, 6 November 2001
- ◆ Expert Group on Biological Resource Centres, 19-20 November 2001
- ◆ LMOs and the Environment – An International Conference Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina, United States, 27-30 November 2001
- ◆ 5th Meeting of the Task Force for the Safety of Novel Foods and Feeds, Paris, 10-12 December 2001
- ◆ Expert Workshop on Genetic Inventions, IPRs and Licensing Practices, to be held in Berlin on 24-25 January 2002
- ◆ 6th meeting of the Task Force on Biotechnology for Sustainable Industrial Development, Seville, 20 February 2002.
- ◆ 78th Session of the Committee for Scientific and Technological Policy, Paris, 19-20 March 2002
- ◆ 11th Meeting of the Working Group for the Harmonisation of Regulatory Oversight in Biotechnology, Paris, 14-16 January 2002



THE WORLD WIDE WEB


OECD's web site continues to grow and includes much material on biotechnology and related topics:

You can find out more information about OECD's work from our homepage and linked sites:

- OECD's Homepage <http://www.oecd.org/>
- Biotechnology at OECD <http://www.oecd.org/ehs/icgb/>
- Biotechnology and Food Safety at the OECD <http://www.oecd.org/subject/biotech/>
- Biotechnology, Industrial, Scientific and Health at the OECD: <http://www.oecd.org/biotechnology/> - under theme "Scientific, Industrial and Health Applications of Biotechnology"

A number of biotechnology publications can be downloaded directly from the web site at:

- <http://www.oecd.org/ehs/public.htm>

 Hard copies of some publications can also be obtained free-of-charge from the ICGB Secretariat

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ENDNOTE: A BRIEF GUIDE TO OECD

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has 30 Member countries. Its principal aim is to promote policies for sustainable economic growth and employment, a rising standard of living, and trade liberalisation. By sustainable economic growth the OECD means growth that balances economic, social and environmental considerations.

The OECD is an institution that enables its Member countries to discuss and develop both domestic and international policies. It analyses issues, recommends actions, and provides a forum in which countries can compare their experiences, seek answers to common problems, and work to coordinate policies.

The Council of OECD is the highest decision-making body of the Organisation. Normally, its participants are the Ambassadors of the Member countries to OECD. It is chaired by OECD's Secretary-General. However, once a year it meets at the level of Ministers. Amongst other things, the Council decides on the annual budget of Organisation as well as the content of the programme of work.

In addition to the Council, there are around 200 specialised Committees and other bodies (including Working Parties, Working Groups, Task Forces, etc.), which undertake the Organisation's programme of work. The governments of the Member countries nominate the participants to all these groups.

The list below shows the main OECD bodies, which have activities, related to biotechnology:

OECD Council

Committee for Agriculture (COAG)

- ◆ Seeds Scheme
- ◆ Co-operative Research Programme

Committee for Scientific and Technological Policy (CSTP)

- ◆ Working Party on Biotechnology
- ◆ Task Force on Biological Resource Centres
- ◆ Biological Informatics Working Group
- ◆ Task Force on Biotechnology for Sustainable Industrial Development
- ◆ Working Group on Human-Health-Related Biotechnologies

Environment Policy Committee (EPOC)

- ◆ Working Group on Economic Aspects of Biodiversity

Joint Meeting of the Chemicals Committee and the Working Party on Chemicals, Pesticides and Biotechnology (Joint Meeting)

- ◆ Working Group for the Harmonisation of Regulatory Oversight in Biotechnology
- ◆ Task Force for the Safety of Novel Foods and Feeds



