



FAO Biotechnology Forum **1**

The FAO Biotechnology Forum is an e-mail based forum launched in the year 2000 with the goal of providing access to quality balanced information and to make a neutral platform available for all interested stakeholders to openly exchange views and experiences on agricultural biotechnology in developing countries. It covers applications in the crop, forestry, livestock, fisheries and agro-industry sectors.

Each conference takes one particular theme that is relevant to agricultural biotechnology in developing countries and opens it up for debate for a limited amount of time. From 2000 to 2005 it hosted 13 moderated e-mail conferences, and in these the e-mail messages came roughly 50:50 from participants living in developing and developed countries respectively (FAO, 2001, 2006a, 2006b). The Forum covers the broad range of tools included under the general term 'biotechnology'. Some of the technologies may be applied to all the food and agriculture sectors, such as the use of genomics, molecular DNA markers or genetic modification, while others are more sector-specific, such as vegetative reproduction (crops and forest trees) or embryo transfer and freezing (livestock).

For each conference, two key documents are produced. Firstly, before the conference takes place, a document is prepared to give a good background to the conference theme, in a balanced neutral way, and written in easily-understandable language so

that people with little knowledge of the area may understand what the theme is about. The document also highlights any particular issues of special relevance to developing countries. Secondly, after the conference, a document is prepared to provide a summary of the main issues that were discussed during the conference, based on the messages posted by the participants.

This publication presents these two documents from conference 14 of the Forum, entitled "Coping with water scarcity in developing countries: What role for agricultural biotechnologies?", that took place from 5 March to 1 April 2007. As for other conferences of the Forum, it was moderated and the moderator was John Ruane. The conference was timed to coincide with World Water Day, which is celebrated each year on 22 March. In 2007 its theme was "Coping with water scarcity" and FAO was the coordinating agency within the UN system for the theme. The conference also complemented two meetings held recently in Rome and supported by FAO, i.e. "The 2nd international conference on integrated approaches to sustain and improve plant production under drought stress", that took place on 24-28 September 2005 (www.plantstress.com/ID2/default.htm), and the workshop that took place on 29-30 September 2005 on "Improving water use efficiency in Mediterranean agriculture: What limits the adoption of new technologies?" (www.distagenomics.unibo.it/wuemed/workshop.html).