

## **Highlights from the 8<sup>th</sup> International Symposium on the Biosafety of Genetically Modified Organisms**

On September 26-30, 2004, 241 policy officials and scientists from academia, government and industry gathered at Montpellier, France, to discuss recent results from biosafety research and share diverse perspectives on biosafety research needs for genetically modified organisms (GMOs). The conference was organized by the International Society for Biosafety Research, which also publishes the scientific journal *Environmental Biosafety Research* (<http://www.edpsciences.org/ebr/>). The local organizing institution was the Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique (INRA).

The Montpellier symposium was the 8<sup>th</sup> in a series of important international symposia focused on biosafety and GMOs since 1989. Biosafety research provides support for the science-based evaluation and regulation of products derived from modern biotechnology in agriculture, aquaculture, and other applications that involve GMOs.

During the symposium a wide variety of relevant and challenging topics were discussed including:

- Commercialization and biosafety aspects of Bt and other insecticidal crops
- Biosafety aspects of virus-resistant transgenic crops
- Biosafety issues of the next generation of transgenic crops, including “pharma” crops
- Strategies for biological confinement in plants
- Effects of GM plants and GM inoculants on microbial communities
- Commercialization and biosafety aspects of GM fish
- Challenges for biosafety research in developing countries - a North-South Workshop
- GMO regulations worldwide
- Methods for environmental risk assessment
- Approaches to discourse and communication on biosafety issues

The symposium was unique in that substantial funding was provided by USA and EU government agencies for a broad-based North-South Workshop, involving participants from 27 developing countries, including Argentina, China, Columbia, Costa Rica, Brazil, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Estonia, Ghana, Kenya, Korea, India, Mexico, Namibia, Slovenia, South Africa, and Togo. In all, 45 countries were represented at the Symposium.

The meeting also featured a public session for dialogue between French citizens and biosafety researchers, and a position paper by Dr. Marion Guillou, President-Director-General of INRA.

The meeting included 61 invited plenary talks and 63 presented posters. The Symposium Proceedings with extended abstracts from these presentations will be made available to the public at the ISBR website: <http://www.isbr.info/>