

FAO Regional Consultation Meetings on "Agricultural Biotechnologies in Sustainable Food Systems and Nutrition"

Introduction: The FAO International Symposium on "The Role of Agricultural Biotechnologies in Sustainable Food Systems and Nutrition" was held on 15 to 17 February 2016 at FAO Headquarters, Rome. The objective of the Symposium was to explore the application of biotechnologies for the benefit of family farmers in developing sustainable food systems and improving nutrition in the context of unprecedented challenges. As underlined by the FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva in his welcome address to the Symposium: "We must count on a broad portfolio of tools and approaches to eradicate hunger, fight every form of malnutrition and achieve sustainable agriculture in the context of climate change". The symposium's focus was on the best ways to make these technologies responsive to the needs and concerns of smallholder farmers worldwide.



The Rome Symposium also highlighted key factors influencing access to biotechnologies and their applications for smallholders, including human and institutional capacities, intellectual property rights and regulatory (especially biosafety) regimes, set-up costs, communication between scientists and other disciplines and with the wider society, and policies that govern research and development (R&D). The persisting uneven access to agricultural biotechnologies was also emphasized throughout the symposium. Developing countries, which continue to lag behind, need significant support in developing their technical and scientific capacities and in strengthening the requisite enabling environment for their family farmers to reap the full benefits of agricultural biotechnologies.

Way forward: In closing the symposium, the FAO Director-General therefore concluded: "Now FAO has to move forward. We intend to bring the debate to a regional perspective. We want to hear from governments, farmers and researchers of all regions about their needs and concerns regarding biotechnology. This will help us to improve our knowledge in order to take the right decisions and move in the right direction. It will also help us to continue building trust among ourselves in order to achieve some level of consensus in the future".



The proposed regional consultation meetings will bring together countries of comparable needs and circumstances and therefore serve as a meaningful forum for the analysis, discussion and prioritization of identified country needs along with the outputs of the Rome Symposium.



In particular these consultation meetings are aimed at engaging a broad range of stakeholders, in particular smallholder farmers, in the dialogue on the role and the use of agricultural biotechnologies. The expected outputs of the regional consultation meetings will include:

- Identified key elements of a comprehensive **regional action plan and road map**, including capacity development initiatives targeted at supporting smallholder farmers;
- Identified priority themes and possible partners for **South-South cooperation** mechanisms to enable countries in the region benefit from the expertise and experience of their neighbours; mutually support each other and develop harmonized and synergetic approaches;
- Identified **regional R&D themes**, which address important constraints for improved food security and nutrition in the region.

A high-level ministerial level segment will be organized for each of the regional consultation meetings. This will enhance the ultimate buy-in of countries as this mechanism engenders ownership of the process by policy-makers at the highest decision-making levels.

Reports of the regional consultation meetings will be published and used as reference materials for developing work programmes while also containing milestones for monitoring and evaluating progress.

Next steps: In 2017, FAO will be organizing two regional consultation meetings respectively in Asia-Pacific and Africa; followed in 2018 with Latin America and Middle-East & Northern Africa.

Contact:

Ren Wang,
FAO Assistant Director General,
Agriculture and Consumer Protection Department
FAO - Viale delle Terme di Caracalla
00153 Rome, Italy