Network Coordinating Groups meet in Bonn

As Phase VII of ECP/GR reaches its mid-term point, the Network Coordinating Groups (NCGs) had the opportunity to meet in Bonn, Germany, on 29-31 March 2006, to review progress, adjust the Networks’ plans and budgets for Phase VII of ECP/GR and to start looking into plans for Phase VIII (2009-2013).

The NCGs are groups of 5-7 people, established within each Network (Crop and Thematic) and composed of the Working Group or Task Force leaders plus a number of other co-opted Network members. Responsibilities of the NCGs are to formulate proposals for the attention of the ECP/GR Steering Committee (SC) on priorities and activities. The Bonn meeting, hosted by the Federal Agency for Agriculture and Food (BLE), was attended by 37 representatives of the ECP/GR Networks, who were able to discuss inter-Network cross-cutting issues and to strengthen joint activities. IPGRI staff and observers from the European Seed Association and the Global Crop Diversity Trust also attended.

During the first part of the meeting, several presentations pointed out recent changes in the operating environment. The audience was updated on the status of the International Treaty on PGRFA, with its Governing Body meeting for the first time in June 2006, aiming at the endorsement of the standard Material Transfer Agreement for the exchange of germplasm within the Multilateral System (see article on page 18).

An update was also given on strategies and opportunities for collaboration with the Global Crop Diversity Trust, an independent fund with the goal of supporting the long-term conservation of key crop diversity collections.

A possible scenario for how A European Genebank Integrated System (AEGIS) could be imagined in the future was presented in a role play: three people representing a Steering Committee member, a Crop Working Group member and an ECP/GR Secretariat member, imagined the ideal situation to ensure conservation and management of plant genetic resources in the year 2015. All the presentations are available from each Network’s Web site (see: www.ecpgr.cgiar.org/Introduction/Networks.htm).

An important session of the meeting consisted of the presentation of the Thematic Networks’ activities by the respective Network Coordinators. This was the occasion for the Crop Networks’ representatives to get a clear picture of the Thematic Networks’ activities and to strengthen collaboration. Each Network produced a progress report and made specific plans for the future. These are included in the report of the meeting, which is available from the Secretariat.

The meeting concluded with the endorsement of a number of general recommendations which were addressed to the SC. Among these, the concept of AEGIS received a broad appreciation and support for its implementation was recommended. Support for global initiatives on PGR conservation was also considered important. Strengthening inter-Network relationships with other regions was encouraged. EURISCO was appreciated as a central platform, which in the future will cover ex situ, in situ and on-farm data on PGR. It was recommended that the Steering Committee consider broadening the range of crops covered by the Network (including for example rice, cotton, currant, strawberry, etc.). Increasing communication with the relevant European Commission services was suggested. Finally, it was recommended that the SC should not only maintain the current budget level, but also consider an increase based on the priorities outlined above, for Phase VIII. A recommendation for a certain amount of funds to be reserved to target ad hoc actions was made and attention to a fund-raising role was also recommended.

Announcing the Mid-term ECP/GR Steering Committee meeting

The ECP/GR Phase VII Mid-term Steering Committee meeting will be held in Riga, Latvia on 5-8 September 2006. Review of progress made by the Networks during the first part of Phase VII will be followed by the evaluation of proposals made by the Network Coordinating Groups (NCGs) for the current and the next Phase of ECP/GR. Broad priorities and objectives for Phase VIII of ECP/GR (2009-2013) will be established, including definition of the funds attributed to each Network/Working Group.

One of the highlights of the meeting will be the review of the results and recommendations arising from the AEGIS feasibility project. A decision is expected to be taken on the way to proceed for the implementation of the AEGIS concept on a broad scale. The future mode of operation of ECP/GR is also likely to be reviewed and re-discussed in light of the recommendations made by the NCGs in their Bonn meeting (see article above).