CIMMYT informa

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CIMMYT, IITA, ICRISAT and BecA

During 8–14 June 2008 in Nairobi, Kenya, CIMMYT, IITA, ICRISAT, and Biosciences Eastern and Central Africa (BecA) jointly conducted the workshop "Molecular Breeding Capacity Building" for 22 maize and sorghum breeders working throughout sub-Saharan Africa. It was supported by the Generation Challenge Program and the Drought Tolerant Maize for Africa Project. The workshop's objectives were to discuss the overall opportunities for and constraints on applying marker-assisted selection (MAS), including aspects of genomics, genetics and biometrics, and to strengthen the maize and sorghum molecular breeding communities of practice in Africa. The participants discussed the benefits of molecular breeding for international and national breeding and research programs, as well as issues of access to germplasm, breeding materials, training manuals, and molecular markers.

CIMMYT maize molecular breeder Yunbi Xu and maize breeder Gary Atlin and IITA molecular geneticist Sarah Hearne were the main organizers of the training, with input from Kevin Pixley, Jedidah Danson, Trushar Shah, and Jianbing Yan of CIMMYT and ICRISAT's Dan Kiambi. Guest speaker Mike Kerns, molecular breeder with Monsanto, provided an overview of molecular breeding programs in the private sector. Presentations from Marianne Bänziger, Director of CIMMYT's Global Maize Program, JaneIninda, Program Officer with the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), and Segenet Kelemu, Director of BecA-ILRI Platform, set the tone for intensive workshop sessions.

Through lectures, demonstrations, and other learning activities, the participants considered both classical and emerging issues in molecular breeding, including molecular markers and genotyping systems; marker-assisted breeding; genetic diversity and association mapping; and breeding informatics. Various activities were organized to design marker-assisted breeding programs for drought tolerance, biotic stresses, and other traits of economic importance. "The greatest challenge is not just to work on molecular breeding but to make molecular breeding accelerate breeding gains," said Bänziger. MAS needs to be integrated with field breeding by addressing specific breeding objectives and combining contributions from scientists in different fields.

"This eye-opening workshop couldn't have come at a better time," said Lealem Tilahun, maize breeder with the Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research. "I am taking home comprehensive knowledge gained in the theoretical and practical aspects of molecular breeding that will greatly assist me in achieving success in my breeding programs in a shorter time."

Representing seed companies, Musundire Lennin of Seed Co, Zimbabwe, said, "Collaborations such as this provide opportunities for sustaining the continuous gains of research. Up-to-date information and technology from this workshop will assist the seed industry in keeping up with trends, thereby ensuring that the gap between researchers and the market is narrowed." He suggested: "Follow up visits from leading researchers in marker-assisted breeding will be of great value in optimally using the momentum gathered in MAS research in private seed companies towards alleviating the current global food crisis."

DuPont donation to CIMMYT

On 19 June 2008, DuPont made a donation of USD 150,000 to CIMMYT, in recognition of the value of the center's maize inbred lines and in support of future work to benefit resource-poor farmers in Africa and Mexico, particularly in the highlands. This donation builds on a number of research collaborations between the company and CIMMYT.

"The contribution demonstrates our tangible respect for the value of seed as intellectual property, and provides CIMMYT with additional resources to support its research," said William S. Niebur, DuPont vice president for Crop ▶

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Genetics Research & Development, who visited El Batán to present a check to CIMMYT Executive Officer Peter Ninnes, standing in for Tom Lumpkin, who was traveling. "It's crucial to garner support for breeding programs that target highland areas worldwide, which are often home to the most disadvantaged farmers," said Niebur, who was accompanied by Hans Bhardwaj, Vice Research Director for Latin America, Africa and Asia Pacific for DuPont; and Fernando González Ceniceros, Senior Research Manager for Pioneer, a DuPont company, in Mexico. Pioneer has used CIMMYT lines to develop hybrid maize varieties it sells in those areas. The guests took advantage of their visit to map out future joint activities with staff of the global maize program.

Ninnes thanked DuPont for the contribution and for the interest expressed by Niebur in strengthening collaboration between the two organizations. "This represents a long-term view that's very welcome," he said. "We greatly appreciate DuPont's generous donation and other contributions to promote plant breeding for the public good."

As Chair of the CGIAR Private Sector Committee, Niebur has contributed actively to the CG system's change process.

Borlaug's daughter and granddaughter visit CIMMYT

Dr. Norman Borlaug's daughter, Jeanie Borlaug Laube, and her daughter, Julie Borlaug, were at El Batán on 17 June 2008 to pack up Borlaug's office, as he is now residing mostly in Dallas, Texas. "We're going to archive all of his materials and make them freely available online," said Julie, as she helped sift through old documents, pictures of Borlaug signed by presidents, awards, etc. The archive will be hosted by Texas A&M University's George Bush Presidential Library and Museum.

"Mexico is still home to me," said Jeanie, who grew up in Mexico City and reminisced about her experiences. Among other things, her father started Little League baseball in Mexico for her brother and helped her with Girl Scout badges. "He was a great father but I had a great mother, because she moved to Mexico and had no language skills. He'd go to Sonora for two or three months at a time. She was a strong person…she raised us and we all turned out okay," she said, smiling.

"The food crisis has made it more clear why my grandfather always stressed, 'we must remember our past, we must remember our history' because we're dealing with the same issues they were dealing with in the 60s with rust, and food prices and fertilizer prices," said Julie, who is manager for external relations at the Borlaug Institute. She emphasized that agriculture is the basis for life. "If you don't have an agrarian system it will erode your political stability, there will be no social equality, you won't have an educational structure, and your medical services will go by the wayside."

"She's been tutored by my dad," said Jeanie. Julie is pregnant with Dr. Borlaug's great grandson. "We do know his middle name will be Borlaug," she said.

Please settle your personal accounts

Please note that the cashier's desk will be open every weekday from 23 June to 4 July and from 21 July to 25 July from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. You can check your account balance at the Finance window, at the cashier, or by contacting Myriam Flores or Raju Taran.

Newcomers

Bacilisa Luna Garrido, Biotechnology Assistant, Genetic Resources, June 5

Departures

Marilyn Warburton, Senior Scientist, Genetic Resources, June 8

Birthdays June 20-27

Luis Santana 21; Carmen Espinosa 22; Ravi Singh 24; Aldo Rosales 25; Eric Nurit 25; Laura Delgado 25; Martín Lugo 25; Arnoldo Amaya 27; Felipe Reyes 27; Luis Alberto Narro 27.

Informa is published every Friday by CIMMYT Corporate Communications. We welcome your input, preferably in both English and Spanish. The deadline for submissions is 3:00pm on the Wednesday before publication. We reserve the right to edit all contributions. Please send proposed material to Connie Castro c.castro@cgiar.org.