

August 6, 2003

Dr. Emil Javier
Chair, Interim Science Council
Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research
Institute of Plant Breeding
University of the Philippines at Los Banos
4031 College, Laguna
PHILIPPINES

Dear Emil,

On behalf of ICRISAT, I would like to submit to you in the attached file our responses to the recommendations made by the recent EPR Panel under the chairmanship of Dr. P. Vlek. We would like to record our acknowledgement of the fair treatment and transparent conduct of the review that we experienced with the Panel. In general, we are most satisfied with the outcome and we believe that this review will be a good guide for ICRISAT in the coming 5 years.

Best regards.

Yours sincerely,

William D Dar
Director General
ICRISAT

CC: Shellemiah O. Keya, Paul Vlek, Francisco Reifschneider, Amir Kassam
Uzo Mokwunye

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ICRISAT 2003 EPR RECOMMENDATIONS AND RESPONSES

1. The Panel recommends that ICRISAT continue to undertake strategic research on genomics and transgenic product development for SAT crops; and together with the other CGIAR Centers and relevant partners, address the pressing issues on intellectual property, biosafety and public acceptance of transgenic crops.

ICRISAT accepts the recommendation, and will continue to ever more vigorously undertake strategic research on genomics and transgenic product development for SAT crops. At the same time, we will expand our research in the biosafety aspects of transgenic crops, and proactively address issues related to public acceptance and IPR of biotechnology products.

2. The panel strongly recommends that ICRISAT should maximize the synergy possible when GT 1 and GT 2 plus their partners work closely together to generate IPGs for the SAT. ICRISAT should rapidly re-build and re-engineer its crop improvement program and further enhance the evolution of the two pronged breeding strategy for Asia and Africa.

We accept the recommendation. The process of integrating activities in GT 1 (Biotechnology) and GT 2 (Crop improvement, Management and Utilization) is already well underway. However, we accept the challenge to create a truly comprehensive genetic resources and enhancement paradigm through systemic multidisciplinary partnerships with NARS and private sector partners in the region. In this way we will fully capture the potential synergy between disciplines and sectors, and hope to serve the differential needs of Asia, Africa and the CGIAR as a whole

3. The panel recommends that ICRISAT phases out GT3 (Water, Soil and Agrodiversity management) research in Asia where it no longer has a comparative advantage, by devolving this research to NARS. These resources should be redeployed in Africa where they should be engaged in addressing some of the major challenges in land, water and agrodiversity research facing the SAT of the continent.

We accept the recommendation and will re-deploy unrestricted funding to strengthen GT 3 activities in SAT Africa in a phased manner that will then better address the major challenges of land, water and agro-diversity research. However, given the availability of opportunities for restricted funding in the area of GT3 activities in Asia, ICRISAT will continue to pursue these simultaneously and create a self-supporting natural resource management team in Asia. In this way, GT3 scientists would continue to contribute to ICRISAT's IGNRM and new science strategies and draw lessons from long-term development programs in Asia to help translate these for impact in Africa.

4. The Panel recommends ICRISAT prioritize its activities in IPM/IDM. Potential projects should be chosen with priority being give to projects that address constraints that are important in Africa and are potentially solvable through IPM and IDM approaches.

ICRISAT agrees with the recommendation and will plan to undertake IPM/IDM research as an integral part of the IGNRM approach to meet the food security needs of smallholder farmers in SAT Africa.

5. The Panel recommends that ICRISAT rationalize the role, scope and objectives in terms of its comparative advantage in conducting research generating IPGs in GT4 (Seed systems). This includes addressing the anticipated problems related to marketing transgenic materials it will produce. The purposes and goals of GT4 will be best served if its activities are strongly anchored into appropriate global themes where interdisciplinarity can be enhanced and resources more efficiently and effectively utilized.

We agree with the recommendation that the work on seed systems should generate further IPGs. ICRISAT agrees that inter-disciplinarity needs to be enhanced and would endeavor to integrate activities, wherever needed.

6. The Panel recommends that GT5 (Enhancing crop-livestock productivity and systems diversification) should transfer assessment of feed quality to GT2 (Crop Improvement, management and utilization) and cease its other activities in Asia. The level of staffing should be increased, and strategic research in Sub-Saharan Africa expanded, particularly in landscape level research on new systems. To ensure coherence in ICRISAT's programmes this theme should be merged with GT3 (Water, soil and agro-biodiversity management).

ICRISAT agrees with recommendation and will transfer the breeding for fodder quantity and quality to GT 2. Component design of IPM/IDM system will remain in GT 2, with system testing of integrated components in GT 3 as recommended. Crop-livestock systems and systems diversification will be subsumed in to an expanded GT 3-- Land, Water and Agro-diversity Management.

7. The Panel recommends more vigorous implementation of the recommendations of the CCER of Socio-economics and Policy Research Programme at ICRISAT, 1996-2001. More social science resources should be re-allocated from GT6 (SAT Futures and Development Pathways) to the other themes under the leadership of non social scientists and the work program of social science should be more sharply focused on strategic assessments and activities that best inform macro and longer run priority setting in ICRISAT.

We agree with the recommendation to more vigorously implement the CCER recommendations for socio-economics and policy research. We are in the process of establishing a critical mass of social scientists in all regions and global themes to undertake strategic research that will generate IPGs, as well as viable partnerships and policy recommendations of strategic importance to SAT agriculture. However, we believe that it is necessary to have some direct visibility for social science activities at ICRISAT. Thus we would seek to create an appropriate balance between those activities managed under GT6 and the remaining social science activities managed in other global themes under the leadership of non-social scientists.

8. The Panel recommends that ICRISAT should rationalize the role, scope and objectives of the Institute in the distance learning for farmers initiative called the Virtual University for the SAT and provide management with clear guidance on where the limits of ICRISAT's interest lie consistent with its comparative advantage in IPG research. Further, the term University should be replaced with a more appropriate term such as "Virtual Learning Centre for the SAT".

The recommendation is accepted in spirit. ICRISAT will further delineate the roles of ICRISAT and other members of the VUSAT coalition. Nevertheless, since VUSAT has been widely accepted and has captured the support of all partners, we shall work with the members of the coalition and the Board to find a suitable way to implement the recommendation.

9. The Panel recommends that ICRISAT should rapidly restructure its programmes and transfer its headquarters, and all programmes except its strategic plant genetic resources enhancement programme to sub-Saharan Africa.

ICRISAT accepts the spirit of the recommendation. It accepts the challenge to find a win-win scenario to enhance its impact in Africa and affirms its commitment to continue shifting core resources to address the needs of the farmers of sub-Saharan Africa as a high priority whilst yet dynamically responding to the ever-changing needs and profile of its stakeholders in Asia. ICRISAT will immediately establish a task force to comprehensively study the programmatic issues, costs (both human and financial), host country agreements, and donor support for various potential change scenarios. However, ICRISAT does not accept the view that the ICRISAT-Asia team should be devoid of INRM or social scientists as we see these as a necessary compliment to supporting well-targeted, upstream genetic enhancement activities. We would propose therefore to retain at least a minimum presence of such disciplines in Asia supported by special project funds.