

PERSPECTIVES

STATEMENT

Joining Forces for Biotechnology in Europe

From Prof. Dr. Bernard Rentier, Vice-President of the European Federation of Biotechnology (EFB)



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Vice-president of EFB

► The European Federation of Biotechnology is expanding quickly, currently with 50-100 new members per month. Founded in 1978 as a federation of learned societies with the aim of stimulating the safe useful applications of Biotechnology in Europe, EFB has now grown to more than

2,400 personal members. It has also opened its membership to universities, scientific institutes, companies and individuals (membership is free for individuals, www.efbweb.org).

The EFB intends to maintain a carefully balanced representation of academic and industrial scientists, in order to provide services in the widest possible domains of biotechnology in Europe and beyond. In particular, its goal is to help make better use of natural resources for the benefit of society in general.

The ambition of the EFB is to have a strong and influential impact on the way Biotechnology develops in Europe. Indeed, Biotechnology has emerged as one of the major scientific but also social and political issues of our times. Biotechnology is now truly changing our world and will do so even more in the future. Its impact on global issues such as human health, food quality and environmental changes including pollution is already immense and will soon become essential. The speed with which progress is currently made in Biotechnology, the increasing number of new

discoveries and of new techniques are rapidly growing and pose major challenges in ethical, political and societal issues. Major concerns are climatic changes, sustainability and human health.

Decisions have to be made by nations and by the EU – in co-ordination if possible. Decision makers are, understandably, not professionals of the life sciences. Thus, they have to seek advice from specialists. The ambition of EFB is to provide such reliable sources, easily found among its members.

To fulfil this goal, and to become able to provide reasoned and matured advice, the EFB has established several Sections and Task Groups, that review the various scientific issues, such as genomics, pharmaceutical technologies, microbial physiology, biodiversity and biochemical engineering (Sections), as well as political, ethical and societal issues such as innovation, public perception, education and biosafety (Task Groups). The Sections and Task Groups provide opinions on these topics.

In addition, EFB aims at assisting young as well as senior scientists in developing new competencies in Biotechnology and in building strategic relationships between Europe and major regions such as East-Asia and South-America where the impact of Biotechnology is going to be major in the years to come.

The European Commission has granted EFB a programme for establishing a network of high level life sciences researchers, industrialists, politicians and government officials and representatives of environmental and consumer organisations in the EU and in Asian countries. The aim is to tackle the challenges posed to developing countries to mobilise the strengths, expertise and resources of the European life science community jointly with developing country researchers. Subjects to be considered are public and private investment, regional and in-



ternational cooperation, institution-building, education and training, university-industry cooperation, use of mass media and telecommunications, intellectual property rights, and methodologies for impact assessment and priority-setting. This programme is already in full operation with the People's Republic of China.

EFB is actively involved in the organisation of congresses and workshops including, every other year, The European Congress on Biotechnology (ECB). The next one will be held in Basel from August 24-29, 2003. In addition, our sections organize specialised scientific workshops and congresses on their own. The Sections, Task Groups, as well as the Executive Board of EFB, are dedicated to make use of the scientific knowledge and the new technological developments in order to help society cope with global issues. EFB hopes to be at the crossroads where science and technology from academia and from industry meet the people and their representatives. EFB's ultimate goal is to make better use of nature's resources to create a better future for mankind. ◀

Contact

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News

■ Conference Background

Rome – The background document for the FAO biotech online conference "What should be the role and focus of biotechnology in the agricultural research agendas of developing countries?" is now available (www.fao.org/biotech/C8doc.htm).