

PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

Negotiations have been taking place since 1994 to revise the International Undertaking on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (IUPGR) under the auspices of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). The latest round took place in Rome in June 1998.

The revision exercise is intended to harmonize the IUPGR with the *United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity* and to provide a general strategy for international cooperation for the conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture.

The Consolidated Negotiating Text contains scientific and technical provisions relating to cooperation among countries to promote the conservation, exploration, collection, characterization, evaluation, documentation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture. However, the negotiations centered so far around the following main issues, which are proving more controversial:

- the question of the terms of access to plant genetic resources;
- the sharing of benefits from the use of those resources, as envisaged in the *Convention on Biological Diversity*;
- the recognition of the contribution of farmers to the conservation and development of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture in the form of "farmers' rights".

Like many other countries, Canada has an interest in ensuring that plant genetic resources for food and agriculture are preserved and made easily available in order to promote the development of new crop varieties and to reduce the dangers which could result from a narrow crop genetic base. As such, Canada has been an important player in the negotiations of the revised IUPGR.

The next round of negotiations will take place in winter or spring 1999.