

## Biotechnology: Ensuring Environmentally Sound Approaches

**B**iototechnology, the application of science and engineering to living organisms, is already helping to feed people and to make them healthier. But it also sparks concern about the chance of negative impacts on people and the environment. Canada and other countries are working to ensure the benefits, while controlling the risks.

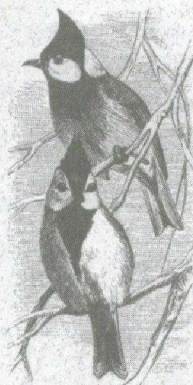
In Canada, biotechnology research often involves co-operation among governments, environmental non-governmental organizations, research centres, universities and the private sector.

2 Canadian governments and industry have co-operated to set up three National Environmental Technology Advancement Centres. The Centres help firms in research and development, business planning, and technology demonstration and transfer. This will help the work being done to export Canadian expertise and technology.

Ensuring the safety of products of biotechnology requires national and international action. Governments in Canada have

developed a series of biosafety laws, regulations and policies.

However, domestic action is not enough. Canada contributes to stronger environmental protection related to biotechnology products through co-operation with other countries and international agencies. At the recent Biodiversity Convention meeting on Biosafety held in Madrid from July 24 to 28, the



majority of countries agreed to request that the second Conference of the Parties in Jakarta in November consider negotiating a Protocol on the safe transfer and handling of modified organisms. Canadian experience in working with other countries and international organizations, such as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), on biosafety issues will ensure that we are able to contribute effectively to a

Protocol that helps developing countries build their capacity to benefit from biotechnology. Co-operation with developing countries already is an important element of biotechnology work in Canada. The Canadian International Development Agency ensures that grants related to biotechnology development now contain advice on environmental protection to help build local capacity in assessing risks from products of biotechnology.

The environmental risk assessments performed in Canada on releases of biotechnology products may also be useful for other countries, building a standard that can be used and creating confidence that biotechnology will not cause accidental harm. 🍁

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November's Conference of the Parties to the Convention will choose a site for the Permanent Secretariat. The Secretariat co-ordinates and performs the work of the Convention and monitors global progress on behalf of the countries that have ratified the Convention.

Canada believes that Montreal offers all the logistical benefits the Secretariat will need. More important, Canada would be pleased to play host to an organization addressing a set of issues that it has made a priority.

Preserving biological diversity means keeping the web of life whole for future generations. It means learning more and using resources wisely. Although this is not a simple commitment, Canada believes it is a vitally important one. 🍁