

**FAO/IAEA International Symposium on
Application of Gene-Based Technologies for Improving Animal
Production and Health in Developing Countries**

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OPENING ADDRESS

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Distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Directors General of the International Atomic Energy Agency and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, and on my own behalf, I have great pleasure in welcoming you to this International Symposium on “Application of Gene-Based Technologies for Improving Animal Production and Health in Developing Countries”

At the outset, let me briefly highlight the mandate and objectives of the International Atomic Energy Agency, and in particular, the mission of my Department, the Department of Nuclear Sciences and Applications.

The Agency serves as the world’s foremost intergovernmental organization for scientific and technical co-operation in the peaceful uses of nuclear technology, safety and verification. It was established as an autonomous organization of the United Nations in 1957, with a statutory mandate “to accelerate and enlarge the contribution of atomic energy to peace, health and

prosperity throughout the world”, as well as to improve nuclear safety and safeguard the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. Thus, the Agency assists its 137 Member States in the use of nuclear technology, promotes radiological and nuclear safety; and verifies, to the extent possible, that nuclear materials are not diverted away from legitimate peaceful uses for military purposes.

The Agency works to foster the role of nuclear science and technology in support of sustainable human development and the Millennium Development Goals. It does this by supporting and coordinating research through Coordinated Research projects, which essentially bring together scientists and institutions from developing and developed countries to work together on defined problems or themes which can be tackled using nuclear techniques. In the field of Nuclear Sciences and Applications, these cover subjects like alleviating hunger and malnutrition, diagnosing and preventing human and animal diseases, ensuring safe and plentiful water supplies, monitoring and reducing environmental pollution, and studying factors associated with climate change.

The Agency also facilitates the transfer of nuclear technology to Member States through its Technical Co-operation Programme. Interregional, regional and national projects are implemented in Member States to strengthen human resources and other capacities for identifying and solving problems in food and agriculture, human health and nutrition, industry, water resources management and the environment.

Both the research and technical co-operation activities are supported by two laboratories located in Seibersdorf, Austria and in Monaco. These laboratories provide scientific and analytical services to research projects and training and quality assurance services in the area of technical co-operation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This Symposium is convened by the Animal Production and Health Sub-programme of the Joint FAO/IAEA Division of Nuclear Techniques in Food and Agriculture in cooperation with the Animal Production and Health Division of FAO. At the outset, therefore, I would like to thank Dr. Jutzi who is sitting here at my side – as well as other FAO colleagues from Rome – for both their assistance in preparing this Symposium and for coming here to Vienna to participate in it.

I'm sure I don't need to convince any of you here of the importance of livestock to our societies. Nor do I need to go into any details about the Livestock Revolution that is now with us – this is something that Dr. Jutzi is better qualified than anyone to expand upon later. Suffice therefore for me to say that this “Livestock Revolution” could well become a key means of contributing to the Millennium Development Goals of reducing hunger and poverty by half in the next decade or so. With around 1.2 billion people living on less than 1US\$ a day and 840 million people going to bed hungry every day, this is surely an opportunity that must not be passed up.

The question, however, is : what can be done to ensure that the potential of this Revolution is fully realized? Can it be made to work for the hungry and the poor and if so, how?

The FAO report on “World agriculture: towards 2015/2030” and the discussions at the Scientific Forum at the World Food Summit in Johannesburg highlighted the potential of modern biotechnology for addressing food security problems. So far, most of the attention given to this subject has been in the crop sector, and in convening this Symposium one of the thoughts that we had in mind was to try to redress this imbalance by providing an interactive environment for discussing the role now and in the future of gene-based technologies for improving animal production and health in developing countries. Another consideration was that 2003 marks the 50th anniversary of the discovery of the double helical structure of DNA by Watson and Crick. Given the numerous exciting developments that have taken place since then in the fields of genomics and transgenesis, and the reality of the Livestock Revolution, we considered the time opportune to take stock of what’s been achieved, what’s in the pipeline and what needs to be done to harness this branch of modern science and technology for responsible development of the Livestock Revolution - given that both the technology and the Revolution itself bring with them opportunities and risks.

I am sure that you will take advantage of this important gathering for the exchange of information and ideas in an interdisciplinary setting, and I’m confident that this meeting, during which 37 oral contributions and some 33 posters will be presented and three – hopefully thought-provoking – Panel Discussions will be conducted, will help in the processes of sharing

experiences and bridging gaps in knowledge about applications of gene-based technologies. Most of all, I hope it will serve to promote greater understanding and linkages between countries in our quest for global food security.

The challenges are great, but I am confident that you will succeed in your objectives. I wish you a very pleasant stay in Vienna, and a productive, scientifically rewarding and successful meeting. I declare this Symposium open.