The CGIAR Consortium Office is now hosted at Agropolis International

An interview with Lloyd Le Page, Chief Executive Officer, and Anne-Marie Izac, Chief Scientific Officer

LLP & AMI: In June 2010, the CGIAR Consortium Board drew up a document stipulating the conditions required for hosting the Consortium Office. Bids were submitted by five candidate cities and, following a transparent and rigorous selection procedure, the French bid was accepted in October.

Technically, Montpellier more convincingly fulfilled the different conditions in the bid proposal: independent facilities, national costs, efficient infrastructures (especially in the fields of health and education), and a major asset is the highly renowned agro-environmental academic and scientific platforms. The Montpellier candidacy benefited from top level political support since Carlos Perez del Castillo, the Consortium Board Chair, had received several letters of commitment from the President of the French Republic, as well as from the French Ministers of Foreign and European Affairs, and Food, Agriculture and Fisheries. Finally, the proposal of the Languedoc-Roussillon Regional Council to finance the construction of a new building to host the Consortium was especially appreciated. Montpellier was chosen on the basis of all of these combined features, and thus making Montpellier a world capital for agricultural research.

We are very grateful to the Agropolis International team for facilitating our move, which has enabled us to keep up our activities through this transition period.

AI: How many people are on the Consortium team? LLP & AMI: We currently have 7 staff.

AI: What was the basis of the choice of Montpellier to host the Consortium? LLP & AMI: The Consortium has yet to establish very close ties with the regional scientific community, but we hope that setting up our headquarters at Agropolis International will facilitate tight links with this community, whose objectives match ours.

We actually share a mandate and concerns with research institutions like CIRAD and IDRS, such as seeking appropriate solutions—along with developing countries—to international agriculture and development issues, as well as an institutional approach with Agreennium an institution which, like us, aims to pool, coordinate and promote synergies among various but related initiatives and approaches.

We are delighted to collaborate with colleagues of different cultures with mutual objectives—finding sustainable solutions to the challenges which the international agricultural research has to face.

AI: What are the Consortium’s key focus of interest? LLP & AMI: CGIAR is striving to reduce poverty and hunger, improve human health and nutrition, and enhance ecosystem resilience through high quality international agricultural research and partnerships.

The Consortium is in particular devoted to fostering scientific synergies and the efficiency of CGIAR research programs (see box).

A FEW WORDS FROM PRESIDENT OF AGROPOLIS INTERNATIONAL

As President of Agropolis International, I am especially pleased that Montpellier was selected to host the Consortium. This outcome is in some ways the shared success of everyone who has worked both locally in Montpellier, since the founding of Agropolis International 25 years ago and during its reinforcement a few years ago, and nationally by focusing French agricultural research expertise in Montpellier. This has given rise to a research cluster of European and global distinction, attracting colleagues from throughout the world, especially now with the presence of CGIAR, which is celebrating its 40th anniversary this year!

However, we cannot simply sit back and rest on our laurels. We now have to take advantage of this recognition and maintain our collective momentum by broadening our usual scope to encompass environmental, nutritional and human health issues as well as others pertaining to the development of human societies. Agriculture is now central to global social challenges, well beyond the usual questions that concern agriculture. It is up to us to address these concerns by enhancing interactions between different disciplines and complementary topics. We must also further develop our international scientific collaborations, by organizing our training programme at all levels and focusing our research on social change and innovation dynamics as well. The challenge is to help solve serious problems that are bound to arise over the next 50 years—improving food security for poor people, balancing the diets of the expected future global population of 9 billion people, managing climate change and preserving the ecological functions that ensure the survival of all life on Earth.

Although the Montpellier scientific community is dealing with these challenges, we should not overlook the fact that it is essential to collaborate directly with other French and European organisations—after all, we are not alone in this task or top experts in everything.

Bernard Hubert, President of Agropolis International

The new CGIAR since 2010

- Two complementary core pillars set up:
  - The CGIAR Fund harmonizes donors’ financial contributions
  - The Consortium Office is a separate legal entity uniting the 15 research centers
- Development of the Strategy and Results Framework (SRF) and 15 CGIAR Research Programmes (CRPs)
- Sustainable management of natural resources base:
  - Climate change, agriculture and food security
  - Forests, trees and agroforestry—livelihoods, landscapes and governance
- Water, land and ecosystems
- Improving production systems:
  - Integrated agricultural production systems for the poor and vulnerable
  - Integrated systems for the humid tropics
- Improving nutrition and diets:
  - Agriculture for improved nutrition and health
- Improving policy and market environment:
  - Policies, institutions, markets to strengthen food security and incomes for the poor
- Improving productivity:
  - Maize – global alliance for improving food security and livelihoods of the resource poor in the developing world
  - Wheat – global alliance for improving food security and livelihoods of the resource poor in the developing world
  - Rice, wheat and fish for and by the poor
- Roots, tubers and bananas for food security and income
- Grain legumes: enhanced food security, nutritional balance, economic growth and soil health for smallholder farmers
- Dryland cereals: food security and growth for the world’s most vulnerable
- Global rice science partnership (CRISP), p. 2

At Agropolis International, next Consortium Board Meeting—May 5-6 and meeting of the Board of Trustees and director of the international research centers—May 3-4

LLP and AMI:

- Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), Nairobi (Kenya), New Delhi (India), Rome (Italy) and Montpellier (France)
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A new engineering specialisation oriented towards agricultural and agrifood innovation occupations

In September 2011, Montpellier SupAgro, in partnership with CIRAD, will be offering a new engineering specialisation entitled ‘Innovations in agricultural and agri-food systems in the world’ (ISAM). This course targets Engineering graduates (M.Eng) in Life Sciences, i.e. Agronomy, Agriculture, Agrifood Science, etc.

The syllabus was designed to address major agricultural issues that mobilize public and private stakeholders in industrialized and developing countries—sustainably feeding populations and ensuring their access to food of sufficient quality and quantity, minimizing the ecological footprint of commodity subsectors and ensuring a fair income for farmers.

This course will enhance students’ knowledge on agricultural and agri-food systems, enable them to acquire analytical skills and expertise so as to be able to prepare and make strategic decisions on organizational and technological innovations, and to advise private and public decision-makers (companies, professional organizations, public authorities, States, international organizations, etc.). It will pave the way to senior staff jobs. Seven months of this 12-month course will be devoted to theoretical training and group studies, followed by 5 months to prepare and undertake a professional assignment.

Montpellier SupAgro organized an open discussion day on ‘the development of sustainable food occupations’ to mark the launching of this new subsector—this event was an astounding success.

More than 120 participants attended the conferences, workshops and a roundtable presided over by professionals (economists, sociologists, researchers, teachers, etc.) who came to discuss and offer their opinions on sustainable food issues and specific skills and expertise that should be developed to address this global challenge in the future.

> TRAINING

> WHAT’S ON IN MONTPELLIER

GRiSP: Global Rice Scientific Partnership

1st CRP launched in partnership with the Montpellier scientific community

Partners: Africa Rice Center (AfricaRice), International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT), International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), IRD, CIRAD and Japan International Research Center for Agricultural Sciences.

Objective: to pool scientific knowledge and technical skills and expertise on rice in order to enhance productivity and nutritional quality, while reducing the environmental impact of production and fostering the performance of rice agroecosystems.

For further information www.agropolis.org (Search “GRiSP”)