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## France

## Biotechnology

## Biodiversity and Biotechnology

## 2005

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**Report Highlights:**

International Conference on Biodiversity, Paris (January 24-28) includes presentations suggesting plant biotechnology as a tool to maintain biodiversity and as a means to help Developing Countries fight hunger and malnutrition. Other presentations included a discussion on the Plant Variety Protection system versus the patent system to protect intellectual property right for new genetic varieties.

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Includes PSD Changes: No  
Includes Trade Matrix: No  
Unscheduled Report  
Paris [FR1]  
[FR]

On January 24-28, an international conference on biodiversity was organized in Paris under the high patronage of French President Jacques Chirac and UNESCO's Director General Koichiro Matsuura. For a more complete information on this conference, please see:

<http://www.recherche.gouv.fr/biodiv2005paris>

Agriculture, planting seeds and biotechnology were the focus of two workshops at the conference.

### **Debate: Is Biotechnology Maintaining or Reducing Biodiversity?**

CON: A Professor from the Paris University of Agriculture (National Institute of Agronomy, Paris – INAPG) expressed his opposition to biotechnology and in general new technologies in agriculture. According to him, farmers should be the innovators in agriculture rather than intellectuals and engineers.

PRO: By contrast, a number of speakers presented biotechnology as a tool to maintain biodiversity in agriculture. A representative from the French National Institute of Agronomy (INRA) presented biotechnology as one of the tools to maintain and explore the biodiversity in nature. Also, a speaker from Burkina Fasso presented plant biotechnology as a tool to reduce hunger in his country. He described the regulatory framework for biotech and mentioned biotech cotton and millet currently being used in Burkina Fasso. A speaker from Cameroun explained that genetic engineering could contribute to enriching the protein content and reducing the toxicity of manioc, which is widely consumed in his country.

### **Debate: Plant Variety Protection / Patent System**

Representatives of the French National Institute of Agronomy (INRA) and of the French planting seed association (GNIS) advocated for protecting genetic resources, through the European system, i.e., Plant Variety Protection (in French, Certificat d'Obtention Végétale). They strongly opposed patents for planting seeds. A researcher with CNRS (National Center for Scientific Research) stated that patents constitute a "theft," as it is the "appropriation of all the genes of a plant," while thousands of them have been present for years as a result of natural selection, and only a minority of genes have been introduced through genetic engineering. The speaker believes that international question on patents must be solved before biotech crops are grown widely in France and Europe.