

Foreword

Plant Genetic Resources: Characterization and Utilization is a new journal concerned with an old problem. Its aims are set out in more detail elsewhere within these covers by its editor, Dr Robert Koebner, who will be well known to many readers, however, its overall ambitions and its antecedents may be of interest.

Over the past 25 years or so we have seen more importance placed on plant genetic resources, not just by scientists but also by policy makers driven by rising public concern over the increased demands being made on the global environment and fears for the future. What are the risks, rights, responsibilities; who are the winners, losers and payers as global exploitation of resources accelerates? Against this background we have seen over the same period enormous advances in science and new technologies emerging. These advances have much to offer in understanding many issues within plant genetic resources but are spread across a multiplicity of interests each served by its specific literature. If they can be brought to a focus, allowed to converge, their power can be harnessed for plant genetic resource characterization and utilization and a perspective for the future attained. This journal seeks to be the lens that brings together, for the first time, multiple strands of modern scientific development with the softer but no less significant policy and other problems in this context.

Many have recognized the emerging need for something like this. A chance opportunity arose when the Chief Editor of the long-running journal *Plant Varieties and Seeds*, Valerie Silvey, after numerous years of distinguished service, decided to retire and forced us to consider the future of this publication. Plant Genetic Resources: Characterization and Utilization was thus conceived. In view of the policy developments stirring in the UK at that time and which are now forming into a strategy for the UK at least, it was decided to precede its launch with a conference in Cambridge last August: 'Plant Genetic Resources in Agricultural and Environmental Sustainability'. This successful event was very useful because it provided keynote addresses and other papers from distinguished speakers in their fields that will be published over the first year of the new journal. Some are included in this inaugural issue. Moreover, a discussion and survey of opinion on the formation of a new International Society to focus on contemporary plant genetic resource issues was substantially in favour. This idea needs now to be progressed in conjunction with others but it holds out the exciting prospect of significant new momentum in this important field: a new forum for action and discussion with Plant Genetic Resources: Characterization and Utilization as its house journal.

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