

Message from the European Commission

The recent food and energy price crises, and the related food security issues, are new elements in the already challenging world context where climate change and globalisation are strongly influencing the agro-food sector. These problems are very complex but it is widely recognised that research has a major role to play in their alleviation. In fact the Presidency Conclusions from the European Council, 19/20 June 2008, clearly state that *“there is a need to pursue work on innovation, research and development of agricultural production, notably to enhance its energy efficiency, productivity growth and ability to adapt to climate change.”*

Such a context clearly opens a new window for plant health and protection research, pre- and post-harvest, particularly for crops which are close to the absolute yield ceiling and for which reducing losses represents an essential way forward.

However, with growing popular awareness of environmental considerations and a food market increasingly led by consumers' demand, market and policy orientations are rapidly changing in the sense of a more cautious approach towards pesticides. This explains why Council Directive 91/414/EEC concerning the placing of plant protection products on the market is currently under revision, while the new EU Thematic Strategy on the Sustainable Use of Pesticides (COM2006-372) is about to be translated into legally binding instruments at the Community level.

These trends clearly indicate that plant health and plant protection need to be addressed with an integrated approach where containment measures, sustainable use of plant protection products, development of more resistant plant varieties, appropriate farming practices and management of biological control agents, in combination with other techniques, including decision support systems, precision agriculture and other new technologies are implemented in a coordinated manner at the farm level but also at the wider local or regional levels.

ENDURE is a major research project supported by the European Commission to answer such challenges. This Network of Excellence, which has four years of financing under FP6*, started on 1st January 2007; it comprises a large consortium of universities, research institutes, farmers' organisations, biological control companies and other stakeholders in Europe and beyond. The Commission has high expectations for ENDURE and it is hoped that the project will establish itself as a world leader for the development and implementation of durable pest control strategies, and will be recognised as the first point of reference in Europe not only for scientists but also for legislators and users.

ENDURE is now approaching its mid-term. The main project's findings and achievements reached so far will be presented during this International Conference. They promisingly indicate that the consortium has the capacity to reach its high ambitions by the end of its mandate, and most importantly, to remain an operating structured focal point in the longer term. This perspective will require a careful preparation and the maintenance of a strong momentum at all levels, involving not only scientists but also a genuine institutional will to pool resources and share a common vision between partners.

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* FP6 stands for the 'Sixth Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development'. FP6 (2002-2006, total budget of almost 18 billion euro) is the main EU programming tool and financial source for strengthening the scientific and technological bases of industry and encourage its international competitiveness while promoting research activities in support of other EU policies. FP7 is the successor of FP6 with higher ambitions: period from 2007 to 2013 with a total budget of more than 50 billion euro. It is designed to build on the achievements of its predecessor towards the creation of the European Research Area, and carry it further towards the development of the knowledge economy and society in Europe. While financed by FP6, ENDURE starts at the same time as FP7 and is fully in line with the ambitions and goals of this new programme. In particular ENDURE will contribute to reinforce the Knowledge-Based Bio-Economy (KBBE) which addresses the needs for sustainability and security of agricultural and increasing demand for high quality food.