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BALA RAVI*

G.T. Scarascia Mugnozza

Community Gene Bank

In 1994, M S Swaminathan Research Foundation received a generous grant from the Government of Italy through the efforts of noted geneticist and breeder Prof. Scarascia Mugnozza to support MSSRF's activities in integrated gene management, which facilitated the establishment of a Community Gene Bank named G. T. Scarascia Mugnozza Community Genetic Resource Centre (SMCGRC). The major aim of this Centre is to support and recognize the community conservation systems. This gene bank is a medium-term storage facility maintained at 4°C and 25% RH in a walk-in cold room. A duplicate sample of 4°C each accession is also stored in the long-term storage at the National Gene Bank, New Delhi as an additional safeguard. The SMCGRC also consists of a herbarium of farmers' varieties. The ex-situ conservation under SMCGRC is distinct on few counts from the widely practiced ex-situ conservation.

Accessions in the ex-situ gene bank are deposited by farming communities, which had evolved and conserved these accessions, with trusteeship entrusted to the M S Swaminathan Research Foundation. The accessions belong to major food crops noted for their agronomic potential under different biotic and abiotic stresses. They are accessible, subject to Indian laws by any party with Prior Informed Consent (PIC) of the holder community. M S Swaminathan Research Foundation facilitates such access through Mutually Agreed Terms (MAT) and Material Transfer Agreement (MTA). Information about accessions have been digitalized into a database called Farmers Right Information System (FRIS), containing traditional knowledge associated with each accession, their passport data and nationally and internationally accepted scientific descriptors. This database is devised to establish the intellectual property rights of farmers on their variety, as per the UPOV norms.

* M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation - Chennai, India. E-mail: sbala@mssrf.res.in