

OVERVIEW OF BIOTECHNOLOGY IN MAURITIUS

Mauritius has been involved in biotechnology during the last decade. Research institutions in the country have embarked on various activities in this field, ranging from formulation and testing of protocols for plant propagation by tissue culture to breeding of genetically modified sugar cane, through use of molecular diagnostics and molecular mapping to improve breeding.

In 1999, via a UNEP/GEF pilot project on Biosafety, Mauritius prepared its "National Biosafety Guidelines for the Safe Development and Introduction of Genetically Modified Organisms" which provides guidelines for the administrative and institutional procedures necessary for the safe application of genetic modification activities.

Subsequently, the Ministry responsible for agriculture and food technology (presently Ministry of Agro Industry and Fisheries) introduced a Non Sugar Sector Strategic Plan (NSSSP) which aimed, *inter alia*, at promoting technology-based modern agriculture, an approach in accordance with the current WTO transformations and with the inherent characteristics of the country, such as insufficient land mass, no natural mineral deposits, as well as high labour costs, vulnerability to climatic vagaries (cyclones, etc), increasing cost of inputs, exigencies of the export markets in relation to food security and traceability. Thus one objective of the NSSSP is the creation of a Mauritius Agricultural Biotechnology Institute and a Food Laboratory.

Mauritius ratified the Cartagena Biosafety Protocol on the 11th April 2002 and it entered into force on the 11th September 2003.