

Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh, India, 2<sup>nd</sup> Feb 2009

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**Prof. Marc Van Montagu was honoured with India's most coveted 'the Genome Valley Award' by Dr. Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy, Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh**

*Biotech Crops Making Long-Lasting Impact on the lives of Resource-Poor Farmers in Developing Countries*

**Hyderabad, India** (2<sup>nd</sup> Feb 2009) – The Chief Minister of India's Andhra Pradesh, Dr. Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy conferred the prestigious Genome Valley Award 2009 to Prof. Marc Van Montagu, Founder and Chairman of the Institute of Plant Biotechnology for Developing Countries (IPBO), Ghent University, Belgium during the inaugural ceremony of BioAsia 2009 held at Hyderabad on Feb 1-4, 2009.

Prof. Van Montagu co-discovered with the late Prof. Jeff Schell the Ti-plasmid and gene transfer mechanism between *Agrobacterium tumefaciens* and plants. His discoveries opened a new dimension in the research and development of crop varieties and opened up the field of plant molecular genetics as a tool for sustainable agriculture production. He was the first to pioneer the development of transgenic/biotech crops including tobacco, rapeseed and corn resistant to insect-pests and tolerant to herbicides.

In his acceptance speech to a jam-packed audience of 600 eminent scientists and researchers, policy makers and industry representatives at the Hyderabad International Convention Centre, he emphasised the importance of agriculture in India that despite only accounting for 17% of her GDP directly underlies the livelihood of 600 million people. The science of biotech offers new possibilities in improving the lives of these people most of them are resource-poor farmers and land-less labourers. It is the time that India shows the way to the world. Bt brinjal also known as eggplant or aubergine, is a hope not only for 1.4 million farmers in India but also for the millions of farmers around the world, he said.

On this occasion, Prof. Van Montagu also released ISAAA Brief 38 on "The Development and Regulation of Bt Brinjal in India (Eggplant/Aubergine)". This ISAAA brief is a very comprehensive review of all aspects of the cultivation in India of the important

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vegetable brinjal, which is likely to be the first biotech food crop to be approved and adopted in India in the near term, following the unparalleled success of the commercialization of the fibre crop, Bt cotton.

Tremendous progress has been made in the area of biotechnology and it has enormous potential to contribute to healthier food, good quality medicines and better environmental sustainability. The Government of Andhra Pradesh is committed to promote the biotech industry, said Dr. Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy.

Prof. Van Montagu's discoveries enable researchers around the world to develop new biotech crops that are helping farmers to halve insecticides usages, double yield and reduce ploughing to help conserve soil and water – the most important element of sustainable crop production systems and conservation.

Since the introduction in 1996, the area under biotech crops has increased dramatically, improved productivity, ensured environmental safety and helped reduce the environmental foot-print of agriculture. Farmers who adopted these crops have not only benefited economically but also there are clear health benefits emerging from the use of biotech crops. In 2007, more than 90% of the farmers who adopted biotech crops are resource-poor farmers in developing countries.

This very high adoption rate by farmers reflects the level of trust in biotech crops by small resource-poor farmers. Particularly in the case of Bt brinjal, farmers, consumers and the environment will benefit enormously through reduced application of insecticides by 80% and better yield.

Biotech crops are a must for sustainable food production, present a unique opportunity for slowing down environmental degradation and slowing encroachment of natural habitats.

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L to R: Prof. Marc Van Montagu, Founder and Chairman of IPBO receiving the Genome Valley Award 2009 from Dr. Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy, Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh and Dr. (Mrs.) J. Geeta Reddy, Minister of Tourism, Sugar, Major Industries, Commerce and Export Promotion, Government of Andhra Pradesh during the inaugural ceremony of BioAsia 2009 in Hyderabad, India on 1<sup>st</sup> Feb 2009.

**The Institute of Plant Biotechnology for Developing Countries (IPBO)** is an initiative of Ghent University and was founded by Prof. Em. Dr. Marc Van Montagu on June 13, 2000. IPBO's mission is to promote sustainable socio-economic development in developing and emerging economies and access to the latest technological developments and the design of effective biosafety and regulatory mechanisms. IPBO contributes to awareness and capacity building through knowledge transfer in enabling technologies, international regulations & intellectual property rights and the promotion of innovative research oriented to the needs of developing nations. More information about IPBO visit: [www.ipbo.ugent.be](http://www.ipbo.ugent.be) . Please also visit [www.pubresreg.org](http://www.pubresreg.org) and [www.efb-central.org](http://www.efb-central.org)