

JAMES RENNIE BEQUEST

REPORT ON CONFERENCE

Conference Title: XI International Congress on Molecular Plant-Microbe Interactions



Travel Dates: July 18-26 2003

Location: St.-Petersburg, Russia

Group Member(s): Andrea Chini, Angela Feechan, Lena Thani, Eleanor Gilroy and Gary Loake.

Aims: to be aware of the most recent scientific results on plant disease and plant-pathogen interactions; possibly to organise future collaborations with international groups; to present and discuss my PhD project results.

The International Society for Molecular Plant-Microbe Interactions and the National Organizing Committee organised the 11-th International Congress on Molecular Plant-Microbe Interactions that took place on July 18-27 2003 at St.-Petersburg, Russia. The congress lasted six working days, from which 2 days will be devoted to the plenary lectures (common for all participants) while 4 days devoted to the parallel symposia. Additionally, an exciting visit of the world-famous Hermitage Museum was organised.

More than 700 scientists from all around the world participated to the meeting that was officially opened by Prof. Mark Van Montagu, who is not only one of the most prominent European plant molecular biology, but he is also advocate of general public understanding of science and controversial issues such as genetically modified organisms. He gave particular emphasis to the fact that there are no scientifically proved evidences of danger or threaten to human health due to the use of GM plants. In contrast, a large and ever-growing number of medical drugs are being produced thank to GM plant technologies, hence their price is significantly cheaper and they are available to a larger number of persons. That was only one of the examples that explain how general public can positively accept genetic technologies once it is honestly engaged with direct human health benefits. In conclusion, he remarked that in the next few years the regain of the public opinion trust and confidence in scientific research and genetic technology benefits will be a major challenge that we can not afford to loose.

A large number of talks were presented, but due to their scientific specificity and the space constraint I would prefer to report about the poster sessions. A large number of contributions were focused on an effective and sustainable disease management in practice. In addition, attendees had the opportunity to observe and discuss more than four hundred posters. The research projects presented in the poster session summarised a very wide range of fields in plant pathology. It was very edifying, stimulating and enlightening to learn and discuss the results of such research with scientists coming from all over the world.

Finally, the last night a particularly pleasant good bye Russian dinner took place and few projects, selected from poster contributions, were awarded. Among them, my PhD project was awarded as “most promising practical project”, and you can see the moment when I received the typical folkloristic “Russian Egg” from the organizer committee in the picture below. This award was not only a great satisfaction for me, but for all the people who worked on the project in the last few years, my supervisor and good advertising for the ICMB and Edinburgh University. Thus I would like to thank the James Rennie Bequest Committees for awarding me the financial support to attend the meeting, which turned out not only to be a great experience, but probably the best opportunity to present the results of my PhD project carried out in the ICMB.

