

study, describes the present situation as "dangerous and deteriorating rapidly," and recommends a series of actions to protect the nation's plant resources. Briefly, the report calls for the establishment of a National Plant Genetic Resources Commission, the development of a national master plan for seed-conserving resources, and an immediate increase in federal funding for the seed conservation effort.

"The genetic variability upon which man depends for future breeding programs is being eroded and lost almost everywhere in the world," states the report, "and we are not taking adequate steps to salvage the material before it disappears. Furthermore, we have lost substantial portions of the germ plasm collections accumulated in the U.S. in the past and more are being lost every year."

#### **Haphazard, Unsystematic Effort**

The report concludes that, although considerable work has gone into genetic resource management, "the effort has been too haphazard, unsystematic, and uncoordinated and has never received the high priority it deserves among the many agricultural research programs. The situation is serious, potentially dangerous to the welfare of the nation, and appears to be getting worse rather than better."

The report vigorously criticizes the U.S. plant programs for failing to mesh in any significant way with international organizations, which currently are conducting some of the most ambitious and promising research and preservation efforts.

Among these groups, the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has been the traditional leader in the drive to interest nations in cooperative conservation of genetic resources. In 1961, FAO sponsored the first major technical symposium on plant exploration and introduction. Since 1967, the FAO Panel of Experts on Plant Exploration and Introduction has met annually to make recommendations. Last February, FAO's O. H. Frankel, generally considered the dean of genetic resource conservation, issued the first worldwide survey of existing genetic resources, in which strains threatened with extinction were identified. In addition, FAO recently sponsored with the Soviet Union a school in Leningrad to train persons from developing countries in plant exploration. Although the U.S.S.R. is not a member

## **Bevan to Leave AAAS**

William Bevan, executive officer of the AAAS, is planning to return to academic life next September, at which time he will have completed 4 years with the association. The board of the AAAS was told of this decision at its meeting last month.

Before joining the AAAS, Bevan made clear that he contemplated a term of only 3 to 4 years. "I have begun to meet my personal goals and it is time to be moving on," he says. Bevan will probably return to research—his discipline is experimental psychology—but has not made any definite decisions on a new job.

While at the AAAS Bevan's major task has been the successful democratization of the association's governing structure. He has also presided over an expansion of AAAS activities in issues involving science and society.

Before becoming executive officer of the AAAS Bevan was vice president and provost of Johns Hopkins University.—N.W.

of FAO, it is, nevertheless, a leader in the field of plant genetic resources and has carefully collected and preserved many of its native seeds.

The Rockefeller Foundation has also become more concerned recently about plant genetic erosion. Although the foundation has granted funds for seed conservation since the 1940's, Rockefeller officials acknowledge that the funds spent on genetic resource conservation in the past have constituted a tiny percentage of the funds allocated to developing and promoting the Green Revolution. In 1970, however, the foundation took the decision to increase its appropriations for genetic conservation from a previous annual level of less than \$50,000 to \$350,000 a year for 3 years. At the same time, the foundation established scientific committees to review genetic erosion in wheat, rice, sorghum, and maize products, since these crops account for nearly one-half of the world's tilled acreage.

Rockefeller has been working in this area mainly through the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CG), a consortium of 29 nations, foundations, and international agencies whose purpose is the mobilization of long-term financial support for international agricultural research. In 1972, a CG committee put together the first concrete proposal for a global network of ten genetic resource centers and a central coordinating committee. At a meeting last month in Washington, D.C., the CG endorsed the establishment of a 14-man International Board for Plant Genetic Resources and decided to allocate a minimum of \$300,000 to \$500,000 to finance the

body. Although Communist nations are not members of the CG, the Soviet Union will probably be asked to participate on the board. Since many of the CG donors expressed interest in contributing funds toward the establishment of the board, the U.S. government will not contribute financially next year. The United States will, however, be contributing to the \$2 million annual program for plant genetic resource conservation approved by the U.N. Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm last year. The Stockholm conference, acknowledging the need for coordinated international effort, endorsed the CG's concept of a worldwide board and regional centers.

The CG's proposed board is viewed by many as the most encouraging international development. The board will probably be officially constituted in February 1974, when the CG subcommittee meets again. Lewis M. Roberts, associate director for agricultural sciences at the Rockefeller Foundation, said that the board would be the first major, systematic effort toward achieving concrete international action in the field. "It's easy to write articles, hold conferences, and scream about the dangers of plant genetic erosion," Roberts said in a recent interview, "but it is far more difficult to get the private, national organizations to commit themselves seriously to constructive, immediate action. Each day we delay, valuable resources are lost."

—JUDITH MILLER

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