

UN urged to ensure open access to plant genomes

March 20 2015

A plant scientist from The Australian National University (ANU) has called for the United Nations to guarantee free and open access to plant DNA sequences to enable scientists to continue work to sustainably intensify world food production.

Dr Norman Warthmann, a plant geneticist at the ANU Research School of Biology, has lodged a submission with the UN, which is currently considering issues to include in its 2015 Global Sustainable Development Report.

Food security depends on an acceleration in plant breeding, which could be threatened by private companies restricting access to genomic information, Dr Warthmann said.

"This information is a public good, it would be a tragedy and a big setback if commercial interests over-ride the freedom of the data," Dr Warthmann said.

"We must ensure this data is available without restrictions."

Dr Warthmann and Dr Claudio Chiarolla, from Institut du Développement Durable et des Relations Internationales (IDDRI) in Paris have submitted a policy brief to the UN urging the ambiguous legal situation to be clarified. The crowd-sourced science brief is currently open for public comment.

They propose that a licence similar to the copyleft licence used in free, open-source software development be used for DNA data.

"Copyleft has revolutionised software development - I am imagining a similar global collaborative environment for breeding our crops to feed a growing population in a changing climate," Dr Warthmann said.

"Companies should still be able to make good seeds and sell them, just not limit the information that is attached to them.

"This type of licence does not hamper companies - commercial software companies regularly use [open source code](#) in their products."

Dr Warthmann does not see his suggestion as the final answer, but he invites others to make comments on the UN process.

"This is a starting point for discussions. The more people comment on this the better," he said.

More information: The science-policy brief can be read and commented on here: [gsdr2015.wordpress.com/2015/02 ... ainable-development/](http://gsdr2015.wordpress.com/2015/02...ainable-development/)

Provided by Australian National University

Citation: UN urged to ensure open access to plant genomes (2015, March 20) retrieved 10 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-03-urged-access-genomes.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--