

A short profile of the Estonian Genome Foundation

The EGF is a non-profit foundation established in January 1999 uniting the entire biogenetics potential of Estonia as either founders or partners (www.genomics.ee). The EGF was the initiator of the Estonian Genome Project (www.geenivaramu.ee), the underlying idea of which is to create a national health and DNA database of the Estonian population in the next 4-5 years and provide broad access to the database for the purpose of performing SNP-based association studies for common diseases.

The current activities of EGF are aimed at establishing favourable conditions for the development of local biotechnology sector to the internationally competitive level. The foundation specializes in organizing, coordinating, financing and promoting R&D activities, training and educational activities in the field of gene and biotechnology in Estonia. The main objectives of EGF include:

- **fostering collaboration within the Estonian biotech sector** including representatives from industry, academia and other biotechnology-related organisations, in order to promote biotechnology in a socially and ethically acceptable manner and to represent the local biotech community in communication with the Estonian state and outside. The EGF is a member of the recently founded non-profit foundation Estonian Biotechnology Association (EBA) and participates in the work of the Management Board of EBA.
- **facilitating public awareness** and understanding of latest developments in biotechnology through various activities including organization of seminars/conferences, producing thematic broadcasts on local TV and radio, publications aimed to general public in non-technical language,
- **monitoring media and press relations** organized for key workshops/conferences to ensure sufficient media coverage of these events, in order to promote public's understanding of biotechnology and encourage public debate on ethical and social issues the application of biotechnology provokes. As a part of this task, EGF has been preparing weekly electronic media reviews on the developments in worldwide biotech sector for local media and other interested parties.
- **holding an annual international Gene Forum** (www.geneforum.ee) in Tartu that has become a top event of the field in Estonia and outside. The forum typically attracts more than 450 people, mainly from the Baltic States and Scandinavian countries. Broad media coverage accompanying these forums will help general public to better understand the achievements and goals of scientists working in the field and result in increasing public awareness in the biotechnology-related issues, which is one of the key prerequisites for developing biotechnology as an industry in Estonia.
- **supporting of academic activities of outstanding students and researchers** of the field of gene technology and biotechnology through a special scholarship fund established in 2000.

The EGF in collaboration with the major R&D institutions in the field in Estonia participates in the BioSPINNO Project scheduled for 2003-2004 and financed by the Estonian Technology Agency for the purpose of development of support services for

biotechnology enterprises in Estonia. The main activities of EGF to be launched in the frame of this project include:

- Organisation of introductory seminars on EU policies and regulations related to the applications of biotechnology for the representatives of the local biotech sector;
- Dissemination of information on international financial instruments (EBRD, EU, and others) to the local biotech sector.
- Organisation of joint exhibition stands of Estonian biotech sector at the major international conferences/expositions to be held in the field (Scandinavian Biotech Arena 2003, BIO2003 International Biotechnology Convention & Exhibition).

The EGF has been an active **member of the ScanBalt Bioregion** initiative and is representing the Estonian biotech sector at the regular meetings of ScanBalt Steering Committee. The next ScanBalt Steering Committee meeting scheduled for September will be held in Tartu, in conjunction with the 4th international Gene Forum 2003, September 12-13.

For further information please contact the Manager of Tartu RBO of EFB:

Ms. Maris Väli
Member of the Management Board
Estonian Genome Foundation
Riia str 23 Tartu 51010
Estonia
Tel: +372 7 420132
Cell: +372 56621301
Fax: +372 7 309701
Email: maris.vali@ebc.ee
www.genomics.ee
www.geneforum.ee