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# **Canadian Biotechnology Strategy**

## **SUMMARY OF ROUND TABLE CONSULTATIONS**

**July 1998**

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Publication Date - 1998-07-27

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### **Summary of Round Table Consultations**

#### **CANADIAN BIOTECHNOLOGY STRATEGY TASK FORCE**

#### **Summary of Round Table Consultations**

#### **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

##### **A) Introduction**

1. [Background and Purpose](#)
2. [Methodology](#)
3. [Participants' Responses to the Round Tables](#)
4. [Reporting](#)

##### **B) Common Themes Emerging From the Roundtables**

1. [Use a Sector Specific Approach](#)
2. [Develop Proactive Mechanisms](#)
3. [Develop a qualified work force](#)
4. [Manage the Time Path](#)
5. [Ensure Inclusive Representation](#)
6. [Fill the Leadership Vacuum](#)
7. [Ensure Transparency](#)
8. [Position Canada to act as a Responsible Leader in the Global Context](#)
9. [Develop Specific Proposals](#)
10. [Develop A Strategic Approach](#)
11. [Increase the Visibility of the Regulatory System](#)
12. [Balance Perspectives](#)

##### **C) Summary of the Responses to the Discussion Paper**

1. [The Policy Framework: Vision, Objectives and Principles](#)
2. [Proposed Advisory Body for Biotechnology](#)
3. [Public Awareness and Participation: Information, Communication and Confidence](#)

98-066321

## A) INTRODUCTION

### 1. Background and Purpose

The Government of Canada has formed an inter-departmental task force to renew Canada's biotechnology strategy. The Canadian Biotechnology Strategy (CBS) Task Force, which includes over 20 federal departments and agencies, is consulting with provincial governments, industry and the community at large. The challenge is to develop a shared vision as to how biotechnology can best contribute to improving our quality of life and to maximizing economic and social benefits in a way that is ethically and environmentally responsible. Related issues of importance include public participation and information regarding the new biotechnology.

The CBS Task Force conducted a series of consultations on the renewal of the CBS strategy in March and April 1998. These included five round table consultations across the country with key stakeholders and members of the larger community. These sessions were held in Halifax (March 24, 1998), Montreal (March 31, 1998), Saskatoon (April 6, 1998), Vancouver (April 8, 1998) and Toronto (April 15, 1998).

In total 139 stakeholders from universities, industry, consumer and non-governmental organizations, the larger community and provincial governments met with representatives from the CBS Task Force. The agenda for the round tables involved facilitated discussions on the three key areas outlined in the discussion document:

- The vision, objectives and principles that will guide the renewal and implementation of the strategy over the next decade.
- Options for the role, terms of reference, structure and membership of a broad-based body to advise federal Ministers on policy directions and emerging issues.
- Ways to facilitate public awareness and participation on biotechnology.

### 2. Methodology

The round table consultations were designed to garner input from a cross-section of stakeholders on the government's overall approach to renewing the strategy and the general direction of the strategy. A consolidated list of stakeholders was prepared by the seven lead departments (Agriculture and Agri-Food, Environment, Fisheries and Oceans, Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Health, Industry, Natural Resources, and the National Research Council and the Granting Councils). Together, representatives from these departments then selected individuals from each of three categories of stakeholders:

- The Knowledge-Based Community which included individuals having special expertise in areas such as research and development, technology commercialization and socio-ethical matters;
- Industry including representatives from associations, business people and producers in Canada's primary biotechnology sectors; and,
- The Larger Community including persons representing the public interest in areas such as ethical and social matters (for example, human rights, labour, and religion), consumer issues, health and the environment.

The consolidated list of stakeholders contained a total of 369 individuals and organizations (36% from the knowledge-based community, 40% from industry and 24% from the larger community). The targets for participation in the round tables were 25-30 individuals in each of the five locations (a total of 125-150 participants) with proportional representation of the three categories across the five round tables.

In order to achieve these targets invitations were sent to a total of 276 prospective participants together with copies of the consultation document and related resource material. Non profit organizations were given an opportunity to apply for a subsidy to assist in covering travel expenses associated with the attendance of their representatives. Attempts were made to contact all of the invitees by telephone to solicit their co-operation and to encourage attendance.

The recruitment targets for the three groups were met; 37% of those attending were from the knowledge-based category, 40 % from industry and 24% from the larger community. In addition 11 representatives from provincial governments attended the round tables.

The table following shows the participation rates (percent of those invited that attended) for each of the three categories.

	Number Invited	Number Attended	% Participating
Knowledge	100	48	48
Industry	110	51	46
Larger Community	66	29	44

Based on the information obtained from the follow up telephone calls the primary reasons for non-participation were the short lead-time and prior commitments. In the event that an individual invited was not able to attend, for example, the executive director, organizations and institutions were given an opportunity to send an alternative delegate. Similarly those invited to attend a specific round table were able to select another location. In Vancouver several members of the general public asked to participate and were included in that consultation.

Each of the 369 individuals and organizations on the consolidated list of stakeholders also received an invitation to provide written comments to the CBS Task Force.

The agenda for round tables is appended. The format for the day was as follows.

- Each participant, including members of the Task Force, was pre- assigned to one of three work groups (except in Montreal where assignment was based on language preference).
- The lead facilitator welcomed the participants, introduced the facilitator team and highlighted the agenda, speaking to the plenary and working group process to be followed during the day.
- Roy Atkinson, Executive Director of the CBS Task Force, added his own welcome on behalf of the Task Force, and established the context for the round tables, commenting on the need for renewal of the biotechnological strategy, the government's approach to the consultation process, the purpose and expectations for the round table and next steps in the process.
- The lead facilitator then outlined a set of driving forces that will influence the shape and velocity of biotechnology in the next few years.
- Participants were asked to introduce themselves to other members of their working group and to consider their objectives for the day and the ground rules for their discussions. In addition, each group spent some time brainstorming about gaps that might be filled or refinements that might be made to the drivers' list.
- Each table was asked to report on the ground rules, which they had established for their discussions, and to comment on the list of drivers.
- The process was similar for each of the subject areas addressed by participants during the balance of the day : in plenary the entire round table considered questions relating to the specific topic and then each work group met in breakout sessions with the facilitators. The groups reported back in plenary, the key findings were charted and participants were given an opportunity to comment on the findings and to indicate individually their support for specific outputs.

### 3. Participants' Responses to the Round Tables

The format of the round tables and the agenda were designed to encourage each participant to contribute to the discussions and to the final output of each session. The requirement to cover all three sections of the discussion paper in a period of 8 hours with only very limited break periods made significant demands on all of the round table participants. The stakeholders who attended initially had indicated their interest and commitment by agreeing to devote a full day of time and in many cases, additional time for travel to the round tables.

At the outset of each round table some stakeholders were frankly skeptical about the potential for the consultation. There were indications that participation in these round tables engendered a shift in the perspectives of some of these participants. The level of involvement was high. In most of the sessions the discussions continued beyond the time allotted and had to be concluded before the entire agenda was fully covered. A number of participants urged the representatives of the Task Force to consider ways and means of continuing the consultative process through the next steps in developing the renewed strategy.

At the conclusion of each session participants were given the opportunity to complete a brief evaluation of the round table. Sixty percent of those attending did so. The evaluation included 10 questions, each using a 10-point scale, on different aspects of the day.

The overall average ratings based on the 84 participants responding were as follows

Item	Average Rating
Achievement of objectives for the day	7.3
Clarity of presentation of the issues	7.2
Logic, efficiency of the sequence of the day	7.4
Opportunity to suggest ideas and discuss those of others	7.8
Considered participation worthwhile use of time	7.3
Effectiveness of facilitation	8.0
Assistance of advance materials in preparing for the day	6.6
Satisfaction with administration of the event	7.1
Think that results will inform and guide development of the policy framework, advisory mechanisms, public participation	6.7
Overall success of the round table	7.0

Participants also provided additional comments, suggestions for improvement and in three of the round table locations brief "messages to ministers". It is evident from their comments that many of the round table participants expect and want the dialogue initiated in the round tables to continue. They also hope, though some remain to be convinced that this process will be more productive in terms of feedback and results than previous consultations conducted by the federal government.

#### 4. Reporting

The information obtained from the round tables was recorded as follows:

- The plenary sessions were recorded on audio-tapes.
- All flip charts presented in the plenary sessions were transcribed to electronic files. These included drawings developed by participants to illustrate models for the proposed advisory body.
- Participants also were given the opportunity at four of the five round tables to record messages to the Task Force on cards. These comments also were recorded verbatim.

Reports have been prepared for each of the five round tables : Halifax, Montreal, Saskatoon, Vancouver and Toronto. The sources used in compiling these reports included the flip charts prepared in each round table, tape recordings of the plenary sessions and accompanying notes. Consistent with consultation protocol the outputs from the round tables have been presented without attribution to

individual participants

This document provides an overview of the results of the round tables in two sections as follows:

Common themes Emerging from the Round Tables

Summary of Responses to the Content of the Consultation Document

## **B) Common Themes Emerging from the Round Tables**

The plenary sessions at the beginning of each round table were designed to give participants an opportunity to focus on the factors that will influence the direction and velocity of developments in biotechnology over the next few years. The following short list of drivers was presented for their consideration:

- **Demand for New Products**
  - Better health
  - Higher yields
  - Lower costs
  - Sustainability
- **Supply**
  - Multiplier effects of technological developments
  - Gene technology to improve quality of life
  - Applications to benefit the environment
  - Inter- relationships among technologies
- **Context**
  - Globalization and scale
  - Heightened public awareness
  - International Agreements
  - Supply of venture capital

This summary provided a jumping off point for discussion. In each of the five round tables participants expanded on and added to the items in this list. Their comments illustrate both the range of views which participants brought to the discussions and the shared perspectives and points of consensus which emerged from the round tables. These are summarized below in the form of the messages and themes that emerged from the round tables. For purposes of this report a common theme has been defined as a number of related issues that were raised spontaneously in several sessions and that engendered similar comments.

### **1. Use a Sector Specific Approach**

Participants are aware that, as noted in the discussion document, biotechnology is an umbrella term that covers a broad spectrum of scientific tools. Biotechnology is an enabling technology, which uses living organisms or parts of living organisms to make new products or provide new methods of production. Similarly they recognize that there may be a different sets of issues related to specific applications and that these may best be addressed in sector specific form. This diversity is only one of the factors, which contributes to their appreciation of the complexities involved in discussions and in decision-making related to the future of biotechnology in Canada.

Participants' awareness of the need to ensure that the renewed strategy addresses these differences was particularly evident in their recommendations for the structure of the proposed advisory body and for initiatives related to public participation and information.

### **2. Develop Proactive Mechanisms**

Participants in the round tables are aware of the need for and in most cases generally support the

creation of a broad-based advisory mechanism comprised of experts which will inform and engage Canadians and guide public policy within the context of a constantly changing environment in biotechnology. A number of stakeholders also stressed the importance of educational processes, both formal and informal that will raise Canadians' levels of science based knowledge. Advocates of increased scientific literacy described the implementation of these measures as "essential"

### **3. Develop a qualified work force**

A related area of concern which was highlighted in Montreal but also received attention in other locations is the importance of developing human resource policies and programs to support growth in basic research and in applied sciences. Participants pointed to the importance of attracting qualified personnel from other countries in the short term and, in the longer term to the requirement to support and promote education and training within Canada. In addition, stakeholders recognized that the growth of biotechnology has implications for the training of those working in related and support professions, for example, law, accountancy and finance.

### **4. Manage the Time Path**

Participants also commented on the need to move forward quickly with renewal of the biotechnology strategy and development of a related action plan. Some representatives from industry and from the scientific community stressed the urgency of federal commitment to funding and other support, which will permit Canada to capitalize on the current window of opportunity. They emphasized that we have only a limited period of time to act given the acceleration of activity in other countries such as the U.S.A. and Japan. Citing the example of Germany, they also expressed concern that failure to provide the necessary support for biotechnology in Canada could result in our being "left out" and lead to reliance on imported products in the future.

At each round table the perceived need for Canada to develop a more focused and strategic science and technology policy and to structure and support the growth of biotechnology within this framework also was identified as a priority for action by the federal government.

Some participants urged caution. There were concerns raised about the possibility of a public policy in biotechnology that might support commercial development at the expense of social concerns. The need for balancing economic and social priorities was stressed.

### **5. Ensure Inclusive Representation**

Participants devoted a considerable amount of time to considering ways of dealing with the pressures which are created between public demand for products, particularly health related developments, which will enhance the quality of life and public concerns about the long term effects of genetically modified products. Similarly they noted the potential for conflict between the demand by industry and the research community to move forward and to capitalize on the economic opportunities presented by biotechnology and those who advocate a broader perspective that would take into account the long term social impacts of these types of technological developments.

At the outset of each round table and in the discussions that followed, participants demonstrated a high level of awareness and support for the requirement for the federal government and its partners to find ways of responding to both economic and social and ethical issues. There was unanimous agreement that the advisory body should be structured and should operate on the principle of inclusiveness providing a forum for consideration of diverse points of view.

Various models were developed and different mechanisms were suggested. The common element was the perceived value of including multiple stakeholders in the process. Participants paid particular attention to illustrating their preferences for interactive linkages and flows of information between and among elected representatives both federal and provincial, individuals appointed to the proposed advisory board, stakeholders and the wider public.

### **6. Fill the Leadership Vacuum**

Is there a champion? Who is in charge? This question was asked directly and indirectly in all of the forums. Management of the biotechnology agenda and the proposed reporting of the advisory body through a number of ministers simultaneously was described as being "too amorphous" and unlikely to produce results. Several of the models suggested by stakeholders for the advisory board included the appointment of a lead minister who would have the primary responsibility for biotechnology.

There was a general feeling that it is time for the federal government to demonstrate both structurally and financially a commitment to dealing with the challenges and issues presented by biotechnology.

## **7. Ensure Transparency**

The consultation document states that one of the principles of the renewed strategy would be "to hold ongoing, transparent and open dialogue with Canadians". Participants were unequivocal in their insistence that this commitment should be demonstrated in every aspect of the formation and implementation of the strategy. They asked for feed back from the consultations, the opportunity to participate in the development of the biotechnology agenda and supported models that were designed to operate "in the open" and maintain ongoing communications with stakeholders and the wider public.

## **8. Position Canada to act as a Responsible Leader in the Global Context**

There was general agreement among participants on the global implications of biotechnology and on the need for Canada to play an active role in the international arena. Discussion tended to focus on the scope and nature of that role. Participants expanded on the vision statement in the discussion paper and urged the adoption of a more "realistic" set of goals and objectives through which Canada would achieve a position of leadership in specific areas such as the development of international standards and regulation related to the commercialization of biotechnology.

The objective of "going for the gold" was defined as a strategy of pursuing the highest standards of ethical conduct as well as for the production of commercial products. This recurrent theme of responsible "action suggested a fairly widely held view that the Pearsonian tradition of demonstrating leadership in standards of conduct provides the most appropriate model for Canada on the world stage.

Harmonization of regulations with those of our trading partners was identified as a priority together with the concomitant requirement to provide information to Canadian consumers through various means including labeling of both domestic and imported food products.

## **9. Develop Specific Proposals**

A number of participants remarked on the high level of generality in the consultation document. While they were prepared to accept the policy framework (vision, objectives, principles) outlined in the document as a starting point, many of these organizations and individuals also expect to have an opportunity to participate in the subsequent formulation of the federal biotechnology agenda. They believe that the federal government should move quickly to develop a comprehensive strategy and accompanying action plans to guide and support the biotechnology industry into the next century and that they expect to be involved in the process.

The timing of the discussion paper and the round table consultations inevitably invited comparisons with the report of the National Biotechnology Advisory Council (NBAC). A number of participants who were familiar with NBAC report suggested in their initial comments (before discussions on specific areas) that the consultation was redundant since the necessary ground- work had been done. This point was addressed at the beginning of the day by the Executive Director. The rationale for and relationships among the various sector and R & D consultations being held concurrently with the round tables also was explained.

The round tables constituted the first step in what was described in the discussion document as a "continuing dialogue" with stakeholders. As indicated above this suggests a commitment to continue broad-based consultation and engagement of Canadians in the development of biotechnology.



## **10. Develop A Strategic Approach**

Another theme, which emerged from the round tables, was the requirement for a strategic approach to the development of biotechnology in Canada including the formulation of an action plan with specific measurable objectives and the evaluation and monitoring of progress against these objectives.

The discussion topics suggested in the section of the consultation document dealing with the policy framework were very general. Participants in each location tended to focus on specifics making repeated references to the need to determine "What we plan to do" and "How we plan to do it". Again stakeholders stated their expectation that the "next round" of consultations would provide them with an opportunity to comment on a set of concrete proposals.

## **11. Increase the Visibility of the Regulatory System**

Another strong message from the round table is the perceived need to raise Canadians' consciousness about the regulatory system for biotechnology. It was described as "world class" and "one of the things that we do really well " but there was a general feeling that the regulatory agencies need to "de-mystify" their operations and communicate with the public on how the system functions. Regulation is the primary mechanism for the assessment of risks and benefits and, in the opinion of a number of participants, could become a more useful vehicle for building public confidence on issues relating to health, safety and the environment.

## **12. Balance Perspectives**

The timing constraints on the round table consultations, both in terms of the short lead-time and the number and complexity of issues to be addressed in a single day, were perceived as limiting factors by a number of the participants. Similarly some concerns were expressed about the limited participation from the larger community (which tended to be most heavily concentrated in central Canada). A few participants also criticized the content of the discussion paper as being too general to be really useful.

The round tables provided an opportunity for representatives from a wide cross-section of backgrounds and interests to express their individual concerns, to listen to the views of others and to work together over the course of a single day on a set of common tasks. In the process participants discovered areas of convergence and developed an increased appreciation for the views of others.

Several participants suggested that this type of forum should be used in the future as a means of both informing the federal government of stakeholders views and facilitating dialogue and exchange among the wide range of groups and individuals who are concerned about certain aspects of the future of biotechnology in Canada.

## **C) Summary of Responses to the Discussion Paper**

Reports have been prepared for each of the five round tables. The following section provides a summary overview of their responses to the ten discussion questions detailed in the consultation document and the principle suggestions and recommendations reported out from the round tables with respect to:

The policy framework : vision, objectives and principles,

The proposed advisory body for biotechnology,

Public awareness and participation, information, communication and confidence.

### **1. The Policy Framework: Vision, Objectives and Principles**

The consultation document included only one suggested question for discussion on these three components of the proposed strategy.

### Question 1 "Are the proposed vision, objectives and principles appropriate?"

Stakeholders provided qualified support for the statements of vision, objectives and principles in the consultation document. They suggested additions and modifications, which amplified and extended the ideas presented for consideration. The changes, which participants recommended to the section on principles, included:

- Establishing the principles first and using these as the foundation for the development of the vision mission statement and objectives.
- Defining the values that form the basis for the strategy.
- Adding to the proposed principles a specific commitment to ensure consistency with human rights instruments.
- Defining and expanding the concept of "sustainable development.
- Increasing investment in human resources and in education to encourage growth in our brain power base.
- Investing in technology transfer as well as in R&D.

Participants wanted to reword the vision statement to place more emphasis on enhancing the quality of life of Canadians and to position Canada as a responsible world leader in developing social and ethical standards and regulations for the applications of biotechnology.

As noted above stakeholders advocated the development of follow-on action plans that differentiate the roles of the federal and provincial governments, industry, the scientific community, the service sector and other partners. Participants in the round tables also recognized that successful implementation of a renewed strategy will be contingent on the ability of the federal government to effectively manage horizontal issues and engage the public in a "national conversation" through the Advisory Body.

Participants want to see follow-on action plans to the policy framework. In this regard they introduced the concept of SMART objectives i.e. those that are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely. Each of the round tables commented on the importance of including in the list of objectives the establishment of mechanisms to address and resolve ethical and social issues.

## 2. Proposed Advisory Body for Biotechnology

There was widespread agreement among participants on the need for and potential value of an advisory body that would engage the public and address and provide advice to the federal government on social and ethical issues related to biotechnology. While most stakeholders agreed that this could best be done through a new body there was a minority view that these functions could be served by expanding the mandate of the National Biotechnology Advisory Council. There was some limited support for a structure that would incorporate existing sectoral advisory bodies, for example, through a "Council of Councils".

Discussions on the proposed advisory body included in varying degrees considerations related to:

- Mandate/role
- Composition of the core structure
- Reporting relationships
- Agenda /priorities
- Substructures
- Relation to stakeholders
- Links to other Canadians
- Time frame
- Cost Effectiveness

In plenary sessions in Halifax, Montreal and Saskatoon the two options suggested in the consultation document were considered in relation to these characteristics. Prompted by facilitators, participants outlined alternative models and then self-selected a specific model to work on in break-out sessions. In the last two round tables in Vancouver and Toronto four basic models developed in the previous sessions also were presented in plenary.

*Option 1* (As presented in the consultation paper): An advisory body reporting to ministers and supported by standing sub-committees in specific areas-ethical and social, economic development, science and others.

*Option 2* (As presented in the consultation document): A single composite advisory body would report to ministers on all biotechnology issues. There would be no sub-committees.

*Option 3* (Originally developed in Halifax): The Expert Advisory Body model would be composed of a group of subject matter experts reporting to ministers on emerging issues and supported by temporary work groups.

*Option 4* (Developed in Montreal): The Council of Councils would be created by drawing members from existing advisory bodies and structured to receive input from and send input to department through advisory bodies and their deputy ministers.

*Option 5* (Developed in Montreal): The "Snowperson" model would incorporate three main components, an advisory mechanism operating through consultative conferences which would meet annually/as needed and provide guidance to a steering committee of deputy ministers which would receive direction and report to ministers.

*Option 6* (Developed in Saskatoon): The Amoeba model would consist of a core advisory body with related working groups surrounded by councils, associations, knowledge networks, stakeholders and non-governmental organizations. The core would receive input from the seven federal ministers dealing with biotechnology but would report through one champion.

Discussion in plenary demonstrated consensus on a number of features that were presented in several of the models. These cross-cutting features included broad-based membership of the advisory body including participation of lay members, openness and transparency of operation, multi-directional linkages among stake-holders, assignment of expert work groups to specific tasks, the use of consensus conferences and other interactive mechanisms to involve stakeholders and the wider public, and the development of communication strategies and educational programs.

The consultation paper contains four suggested questions regarding the advisory body.

**Question 2:** "What should be the terms of reference and structure of the new federal advisory body?"

The primary role ascribed to the proposed advisory body by participants would be to identify issues (through input from ministers, stakeholders and the wider public), to obtain information to assist in its deliberations (through independent research, input from stakeholders and work groups) and to provide advice to federal ministers, preferably through a champion. Some participants expressed the hope that over time the body also would work with provincial governments.

The two models suggested in the consultation document were modified to include two way linkages between and among the various stakeholders. Most participants supported the concept of a body that would operate in an independent and interactive manner in relation to the government stakeholders and the public.

As indicated by the descriptions of the four models that were suggested as alternatives there were differences among participants on the structure of the core body. Much of that discussion revolved around the difficulties involved in defining "experts" and establishing criteria for membership. Several participants recommended that we learn from the experience of others and examine the benefits and limitations of models that operate in other countries.

**Question 3:** "Regarding membership, what should be the composition, membership criteria, qualifications and length of terms?"

Participants want to ensure that the individuals appointed to the proposed advisory body have the necessary qualifications to work with and balance diverse interests. This means that committee members will have specialized knowledge in key areas such as science, economic development and consumer/public interests but that they should not be appointed as representatives of these constituencies. They must be able to transcend narrowly defined interests in order to reflect wider "citizenship concerns" and to exercise judgement in operating with scientific, economic and social and ethical issues.

Participants in those sessions, which considered questions of size and duration, tended to prefer a core group of 15-20 people. The lowest number mentioned for the Advisory Body was 10 people and the largest was 30 with at least 2-3 lay persons. The terms suggested ranged from 3 to 5 years.

**Question 4:** "Is the advisory body an appropriate mechanism to facilitate a dialogue among Canadians and with the government, or should the body concentrate on receiving public input and providing advice and recommendations to ministers?"

Participants did not accept the dichotomy implied by this question. They developed and described models that would use dialogue as a key source of input. They suggested the use of a wide menu of interactive processes including consultative conferences, citizens juries, science courts, traditional public opinion research, secondary research, deliberative polling, science shops and affinity networks. Further they stressed the importance of providing the results of these activities to the public using a variety of channels for example, the Internet, print, and 800 telephone numbers and in general urged a more creative approach to communications with the public, particularly with young Canadians.

**Question 5:** "On what priorities should the advisory body focus?"

The most frequently mentioned priority for the proposed advisory body was to address emerging or "hot" issues that have social and ethical consequences such as Dolly.

In order to function effectively the proposed body would employ mechanisms that will enable it to identify and respond to issues as these emerge.

Participants agreed that the Advisory Body would not arbitrate regulatory decisions but rather advise on larger policy direction. They also promoted a partnership approach to public education noting that all stakeholders have a role to play in this critical area including but not limited to government, industry, the universities and research institutions.

### **3. Public Awareness and Participation: Information, Communication and Confidence**

The consultation paper contained five suggested questions for this topic area.

**Question 6:** "What kinds of information does the public need, and how do these needs differ by sector and application?"

This question was considered too broad to be dealt with in any detail by the round table participants. The results of the public opinion survey, focus groups and submissions will assist in identifying these requirements. The output from the round tables does point to:

- The need to have a communications strategy in biotechnology that uses a partnership approach.
- The need to create a strategy that recognizes differences in ethical values and belief systems.
- The potential of using partnerships/affinity networks to address specific information needs.
- The requirements to inform, engage and empower members of the general public especially

- students and young people
- The value of undertaking a concerted effort to improve knowledge and information levels about science beginning in primary school
- The need to provide consumers with information to enable them to make informed choices
- The requirement to differentiate information, education and advocacy amongst the various publics
- The importance of recognizing and responding to different levels of interest, knowledge, understanding and education within the general public

**Question 7: "What are the best ways to make information to the public available?"**

As noted above the feedback from the round table discussions suggest that, in addition to the work of the advisory body consideration should be given to developing a menu of communication activities and to using a strategic approach to defining specific objectives for different target populations.

While there was no agreement on "best ways" participants did note that the mediums used should be appropriate to the content and that this will require that those involved demonstrate more fluency in the use of new information technologies.

**Question 8: "What are the roles of industry, academia, non government organizations and governments in providing information?"**

The round tables lacked sufficient time to explore this topic in depth. There was some discussion on the importance of providing information that will be perceived as credible to the public especially in specifying the risks and benefits that may be associated with food products.

The round tables highlighted the challenge for the consumer of accessing and assessing the credibility of information from diverse sources:

- The federal government was viewed as having the primary responsibility of ensuring through the regulatory system for protecting the health and safety of Canadians and for sustaining the environment.
- Participants from the scientific and research community reminded other participants that their work is conducted in accordance with ethical codes of conduct and is subject to peer review.
- Industries using biotechnology do not at this time use a common set of standards but their products are subject to regulation and they work with the regulatory system.
- Non-government organizations may undertake research and provide information to stakeholders.

At present the onus is on consumers and members of the public to seek out information from these various sources and to educate themselves.

**Question 9: "What mechanisms should the federal government implement to facilitate increase public awareness and understanding of biotechnology products and processes?"**

Participants agreed that this is a continuing educational process that will involve all stakeholders and will require co-ordination of the activities of the participating agencies. The objective of increasing awareness cannot be achieved through "propaganda" but will require the implementation of formal and informal education programs that are grounded in an understanding of the values and concerns of various segments of the public.

**Question 10: "Should ongoing consultation mechanisms be established to increase the two way flow of information between government and the public, and, if so, what form should they take? Is the new advisory body an appropriate vehicle?"**

Stakeholders from all of the groups represented at the round tables consider two-way processes to be

absolutely essential. The advisory body is expected to operate in an interactive manner ensuring that all stakeholders have an equal opportunity to present their views on specific issues and to have access to the information used by and generated from the core structure.

The consultation document was presented by the CBS Task Force as a starting point in a process. The tenor and content of the discussions indicates that stakeholders are prepared to continue the dialogue initiated through the round table consultations and that they will be looking for evidence that their contributions have produced tangible results.

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