CALL FOR EXPERTS IN GENE EDITING TECHNOLOGY

1. Introduction and Background

Gene editing has recently come under the spotlight with the development of CRISPR/Cas systems which provide simplicity and ease of targeted gene editing process. The risks involved in gene editing technology products are significantly low because the changes are like those found in naturally occurring populations. Furthermore, once the gene editing agents have segregated out, there is no distinction between a ‘naturally occurring’ mutation and a gene edit. Therefore, the introduction of genome editing into modern breeding programs should facilitate rapid and precise crop improvement.

The International Seed Federation (ISF) defines gene editing as a method that enables plant breeders to make precise changes to the plant’s genetic material, which can improve their productivity and sustainability. This often mirrors changes that could occur in nature or through traditional breeding. The new plant will display desired characteristics such as drought tolerance, disease resistance, improved yields and nutritional value, and even limited allergens in certain crops. The editing tool acts within the plant cell’s DNA and no foreign DNA is inserted into the plant. Therefore, gene editing develops plants similar to those that could have been created through traditional breeding methods (https://www.worldseed.org/resources/faqs/#plant-breeding-innovation). However, adoption of gene editing technology in Africa is still very limited due to lack of awareness and misinformation.

Africa Harvest (www.africaharvest.org), CropLife International (www.croplife.org) and NASAC (www.nasaconline.org) are calling for experienced and distinguished experts (senior or early-career researchers) on gene editing technology in Africa. Experts who wish to stand out and be the voice of promoting the gene editing technology in Africa and beyond.

2. Expertise required

Competence in performing the following tasks;

a) Creating awareness and policy advocacy on gene editing and enhancing public acceptance and support.

b) Building support for the adoption and utilization of gene editing technology among scientists and researchers in academia and research institutions.

c) Supporting the development of enabling regulatory policies on gene editing technology to enhance product commercialization.
3. Basic and essential qualifications of experts

Africa Harvest, CropLife International and NASAC value technical qualification and independence of the participating experts as well as to the transparency of its selection process. Therefore, well-defined procedures have been developed to select the experts, promote scientific excellence and encourage independence of opinions.

The applicants should fulfil the following basic and essential qualifications:

a) Advanced university degree(s) in, biology, plant breeding, biochemistry, Genetics, Biotechnology or microbiology.

b) Scientific publications in peer reviewed journals, in particular, relevant publications within the last ten years, or proven experience in delivering scientific opinions in Agriculture, food technology, food safety/risk assessments (including exposure assessments) at national, regional or international level.

c) At least five (5) years of professional experience in biotechnology, plant breeding, food safety risk assessments and in gene editing.

d) Ability to prepare documents and spreadsheets in electronic format;

e) Good knowledge of existing data and methodologies used in plant breeding, biotechnology and or gene editing.

f) Past participation in national or international scientific bodies, committees, etc., pertinent to the above disciplines and described tasks.

g) No previous frontline advocacy for or affiliation with Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO) technology.

Applicants must also have a good working knowledge of English as meetings and correspondence will be in English.

4. Criteria and process for selection of experts

The criteria for the selection of experts are the basic and essential qualifications together with the proven competence and expertise in various tasks related to gene editing as described above. The abridged curriculum vitae (CV) of applicants will be reviewed on the basis of the criteria listed above by a selection panel. The purpose of the panel review is to determine whether an applicant meets all the essential requirements. Successful individuals selected through this process will attend both virtual and physical trainings, conferences and other meetings on Gene Editing Technology scheduled in 2021-2022, where they are to present expert opinions and literature on gene editing technology. The selection process will also take into account, diversity and complementarities of scientific backgrounds, and balanced representation from geographic regions, countries as well as gender, besides the scientific and technical excellence.
5. General description of the procedure of appointment of Experts
Interested experts are invited to submit an expression of interest in accordance with the procedure set out in this notice. A list of experts who meet the criteria set out in this call will then be constituted. Successful applicants will then be invited to participate in their individual scientific capacity. No expert shall represent the position of the government of which he or she is a citizen, or of the institution with which he or she is associated.

6. Application
Interested applicants should electronically submit their CVs including a description of their education, work experience and reference of two persons with knowledge of the professional qualifications and a list of peer reviewed publications relevant to the expertise indicated above. Before participating in this initiative, applicants will be required to declare any potential interests in writing indicating any potential conflict of interest on their part or their spouse that may affect their scientific independence as experts including one or more of the following conditions: employment (past or present) by any commercial enterprise or private or civil sector association opposed to modern plant breeding technologies such as gene editing; a recipient of research or other study grants from such enterprises or associations; or shareholdings in commercial enterprises active in fields related to any specific opposition to modern plant breeding technologies such as gene editing. In addition, a confidentiality undertaking will also to be signed to ensure proper handling of dossiers and proprietary information. Use this link to apply. https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfLIp0eMmy0QRPrLUriZRKmewhqGD2zd8YQIvtc9o1DsjtXQ/viewform?usp=sf_link

7. Contracting authority and registration procedure
The contracting authority is the Network of African Science Academies (NASAC), supported by Africa Biotech Foundation International (Africa Harvest). The objective of this Call is to set up a list of experts in Gene Editing Technology in Africa. Inclusion on the list entails no contractual obligation on the part of the contracting authority. The list resulting from this notice will be used exclusively for execution of the tasks within the fields described in this call under item 4 above.

8. Information and personal documents to be provided
Interested applicants should provide their full contact details in their expression of interest. The supporting evidence (the documents of qualifications referred to in this call do not need to be uploaded in the electronic system of submission during the application process, but may be requested by the contracting authority at a later stage) to be provided for the evaluation process.
Processing the applications involve recording and processing of personal data (such as your name, address and CV). Such data will be kept confidential and solely used for the selection process by the contracting authority.

9. Exclusion criteria

Experts shall be excluded from participation if:

a) They are bankrupt or being wound up, are having their affairs administered by the courts, have entered into an arrangement with creditors, have suspended business activities, are the subject of proceedings concerning those matters, or are in any analogous situation arising from a similar procedure provided for in national legislation or regulations.

b) They or persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control over them have been convicted of an offence concerning their professional conduct by a judgment of a competent authority.

c) They have been guilty of grave professional misconduct proven by any means which the contracting authority can justify.

d) They are not in compliance with their obligations relating to the payment of social security contributions or the payment of taxes in accordance with the legal provisions of the country in which they are established.

e) They have been the subject of a judgment which has the force of ‘res judicata’ for fraud, corruption, involvement in a criminal Organisation, money laundering or any other illegal activity.

f) They have a conflict of interest in connection with the contract; a conflict of interest could arise in particular as a result of economic interests, political or national affinities, family or emotional ties or any other relevant connection or shared interest.

10. Deadline

The deadline for submission for this call for experts is **20 September 2020**. Evaluation of the applications will be carried out after the deadline and only successful candidates will be contacted.

Applications should be submitted electronically before the deadline using the link below.

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSflIpOeMmy0QRPrLUriZRKmewhGqGD2zd8YQ1vtc9o1DsjtXQ/viewform?usp=sf_link