



## *News Release*

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### **Temasek Foundation, Singapore and Temasek Life Sciences Laboratory collaborate on research training and manpower development programmes in Laos**

#### **- Temasek Foundation grant to support 2 programmes in rice crop improvement and biorisk management**

Temasek Life Sciences Laboratory (TLL) and Temasek Foundation (TF) are pleased to announce the commencement of two technical training programmes in the field of rice crop improvement as well as biorisk management of emerging infectious diseases, in partnership with national agencies from the People Democratic Republic of Lao. Temasek Foundation has committed a grant of S\$490,000 (about US\$365,000) towards these 2 programmes. Through these programmes, TF and TLL hope to support the capability and capacity building of professionals in Laos in rice research and biorisk management through the transfer of specific key technologies, knowledge and expertise.

In all, an initial group of 22 participants have been selected by their respective agencies to participate in the first phase of a series of training programmes, and in turn, they will pass on the knowledge and experience to their peers and other technical staff in Laos. The establishment of these training programmes will help to build new foundation for future partnership between Singapore and Laos and accelerate the use and deployment of technology and knowledge towards improving the level of food security as well as preparedness against future emerging diseases in Laos.

#### **Rice crop improvements**

In the area of rice crop improvement, TLL has signed a Research Collaboration Agreement with the National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute (NAFRI), to provide training and manpower development on molecular marker development and marker-assisted breeding technology. These technologies have demonstrated the potential to help facilitate the rapid co-development of new rice varieties with specific desirable traits. By working with NAFRI, TLL hopes that the participants of this program will be able to assist in the development of new rice lines that are suitable for cultivation in the climatic and geographical region in Laos. NAFRI will



also provide opportunities for these researchers to work with other rice breeders so that a network of local capability to test and trial such improved varieties in the different provinces of Laos will be created. Through the use of modern molecular techniques and traditional breeding, the agencies hope to see a new generation of rice breeders in Laos contributing to future regional food security. This training programme is supported with a grant of about S\$290,000 (about US\$216,000) from TF, while TLL is providing in-kind contributions of scientific research equipment which will be used both during the training as well as in the development of new rice lines.

“We are happy to work with TLL who has extensive experience and expertise in rice research. We believe that the sharing of this important marker-assisted rice breeding know-how will help us in the development of improved rice varieties, and provide us with the opportunity to carry out rice improvement programmes independently in the future,” says Dr Bouahome Bounthong, Director General, NAFRI.

### **Biorisk Management**

TLL and TF will also partner with the National Emerging Infectious Diseases Coordination Office (NEIDCO), another national agency in Laos to develop nationwide and institutional capabilities in laboratory biorisk management. Since 2004, TLL has carried out various biorisk and biosafety training programmes with governmental agencies from various regional countries and will adapt from the experiences of working with these agencies. With inputs from NEIDCO and the World Health Organisation in Laos, TLL has developed a customised programme that will be developed and used for future training needs in Laos, which will be funded by a grant of S\$200,000 (about US\$149,000) from TF. This is part of a joint programme, where TF has committed grant funding to TLL to support similar biorisk management programmes in other ASEAN countries over a four-year period. Practices of biosafety and biosecurity are becoming an important technical strategy for these countries to effectively contain infectious disease outbreaks. This collaboration will build up capabilities leading to future opportunities to help regional countries to augment their disease surveillance programmes, thus minimising the social and economic impact from potential emerging disease outbreaks.

“We are excited to work with TLL in this training programme as we hope to tap on TLL’s experience and past involvement in conducting biosafety training for the promotion of biosafety and biosecurity in Laos,” says Dr Bounlay Phommasack, Director General, NEIDCO.

“We are pleased to be partners with TF and Laos in the above training programmes. Our collaboration with NAFRI and NEIDCO are important linkages that we hope will lead to even more fruitful exchanges between TLL and other agencies and organisations in Laos,” says Mr Peter Chia, Chief Operating Officer, TLL.

“Through these two programmes, we hope that a network of specialists will be formed to share their knowledge and expertise in rice crop development studies and biorisk management, and enable them to make a positive impact on the community in Laos, and possibly, in other communities across Asia,” says Benedict Cheong, Chief Executive Officer, TF.



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### **About Temasek Life Sciences Laboratory (TLL)**

TLL is a non-profit organisation established in 2002 to undertake cutting-edge research in molecular biology and genetics utilising a broad range of model organisms. TLL is affiliated to the National University of Singapore and Nanyang Technological University. Our vision is to create an environment which can attract the brightest young minds worldwide, support their research and challenge them to be leaders in their own fields. TLL has extensive experience and complementary expertise in plant biology research, including several research groups working on rice research. TLL has also been an active collaborating partner with government health ministries and international agencies in the promotion of biosafety and biosecurity training.

For more information, visit [www.tll.org.sg](http://www.tll.org.sg)

### **About Temasek Foundation (TF)**

TF is a non-profit philanthropic organisation anchored in Singapore that seeks to contribute to sustainable growth and a bright future of hope and opportunities for people in Asia. The foundation works with partners to support programmes that develop people through health care, education and research, programmes that build bridges between peoples, programmes that build institutions of excellence through good governance and ethics, and programmes that rebuild lives and livelihoods affected by natural disasters.

For more information, visit [www.temasekfoundation.org.sg](http://www.temasekfoundation.org.sg)

### **About National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute (NAFRI)**

NAFRI was established in 1999 to consolidate agriculture and forestry research activities within the country and to develop a coordinated National Agriculture and Forestry Research System. The Rice and Cash Crop Research Institute (RCCRC) became a subsidiary of NAFRI in 1999. It is formerly known as the Agricultural Research Center, established in 1983 under the integrated Agricultural Research Project. The research centre conducts training and capacity development programs for local institutions, maintain date management for agriculture and coordination of agencies for maximising rice production.

For more information, visit [www.nafri.org.la](http://www.nafri.org.la)

### **About National Emerging Infectious Diseases Coordination Office (NEIDCO)**

NEIDCO is a national health agency established under the Lao P.D.R. Ministry of Health to look into the pandemic preparedness / response plan and surveillance for emerging infectious diseases in Lao P.D.R. and is located in Vientiane, Lao P.D.R.

For more information, visit [www.neidco.org](http://www.neidco.org)



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