

Media Release

Adelaide, Australia, 10 February 2011



Patent to be granted for salinity tolerance technology

The **Australian Centre for Plant Functional Genomics'** first patent application has been accepted for grant in Eurasia. The patent covers salinity tolerance in plants and applies in Turkmenistan, Belarus, Tajikistan, Russia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia and the Moldova regions.

The technology was invented by ACPFG scientists Mark Tester, Andrew Jacobs, Juan Juttner, Alfio Comis and Christina Lunde (now of the University of Copenhagen).

The patent is for a protein that sits in a plant cell's outer membrane and pumps sodium ions from the cell, thus improving the plants salinity tolerance.

'The patent demonstrates that ACPFG research is not only world standard from a scientific perspective, but it also passes the difficult requirements for patentability,' commented CEO, Professor Peter Langridge. 'Some of our other patent filings will also be granted this year.'

'Salinity is a problem in many parts of the world and a major cause of crop loss in much of the developing world,' he said. 'Eurasia is a major crop growing region and also suffers from salinity problems.'

Patent applications for 30 technologies have been filed by the ACPFG since it commenced in 2003. Many of these are working their way through the patent systems in various regions.

'This technology is still many years away from commercial production but this first patent is a significant achievement for ACPFG' said Michael Gilbert, ACPFG's General Manager.

ACPFPG has over 130 staff and students and has published 240 peer-reviewed journal articles focused on improving the ability of wheat and barley to withstand abiotic stresses such as drought and salinity.

'Gene patents are currently controversial but they are an important tool in biological sciences,' Mr Gilbert said. 'Whilst patents are expensive and difficult to get, they enable us to protect the interests of Australian scientists and growers.'

'Patents are an asset that we can use to deal with large multi-national companies in the area of agricultural biotechnology,' he said.

ACPFPG retains Philips Ormond Fitzpatrick as patent advisors.

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ACPFPG scientists are improving cereal crops' tolerance to environmental stresses such as drought, heat, salinity and nitrogen use efficiency. These stresses are a major cause of yield and quality loss throughout the world and cause significant problems for cereal growers. For more information on ACPFG visit www.acpfg.com.au