

## Opening Remarks: Perspectives of the International Cotton Genome Initiative

YU John Z, PERCY Richard G

(USDA-ARS, Southern Plains Agricultural Research Center, 2881 F & B Road, College Station, TX 77845, USA)

Thanks go to our hosts, the organizers, sponsors, and all participants who have put in great efforts to making the 2008 Research Conference of the International Cotton Genome Initiative (ICGI, <http://icgi.tamu.edu/meeting/2008/>) possible. Special thanks go to our host here in Anyang, and to our host country, China - the world's largest cotton producer and consumer. The biennial ICGI Research Conference is a major venue for the global cotton community to exchange information and to formulate, prioritize, and coordinate future collaborative research efforts in cotton genomics. The conference is a tremendous opportunity for the cotton research community to create opportunities for itself and to take bold steps towards shaping cotton's future. The current conference program includes plenary keynote sessions, concurrent workgroup sessions, a panel discussion on cotton genome sequencing, and a special session in which China will share its "973" cotton genomics program. This conference has received over 230 registrations from 18 countries, and 130 scientific abstracts for oral and poster presentations in different cotton genomic research areas. The science to be presented at the meeting is cutting edge and of extreme importance to the future genetic improvement of this global commodity. Recently, all ICGI workgroup leaders have proposed top research priorities to develop cotton genomic resources that are of widespread benefit to the industry. These research proposals, to be discussed in breakout sessions, will lay the groundwork for future research projects that require global collaboration and coordination.

Cotton (*Gossypium* spp.), an immensely important crop worldwide, has lacked representation by an international research organization that could facilitate global collaboration and coordination, and has lagged behind other major crops in genome research. For these reasons, the ICGI was conceived in 2000 by a group of cotton scientists and industry representatives to facilitate communication and coordinate cotton genome research. Over the past 8 years, ICGI has continued to define and develop its mission to increase knowledge of the structure and function of the cotton genome for the benefit of the global community. ICGI has established its Constitution and By-Laws as a guiding document for its activities. ICGI has facilitated numerous formal and informal collaborative research projects through increased communications and collaborations among the global colleagues in its five workgroups. Genomic resources and information are exchanged among the global cotton community. Currently, ICGI has representation of 577 cotton scientists and industry representatives from 35 countries around the world. With rotating officers who are elected every two years and who have a rich collection of scientific perspectives, ICGI and its workgroups are charged with building a broad base of resources and information for coordinated cotton genome projects that are of common interest and mutual benefit. Ongoing efforts include increased emphasis on workgroup-based initiatives, focusing biennial meetings on practical work sessions, and proactively supporting international efforts toward cotton genome sequencing, among other key initiatives. Hopefully all ICGI participants will use the opportunities afforded by this conference to explore new means of coordinating and collaborating in research to the betterment of cotton and the cotton industry.