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Chief Scientist's Group

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3 December 2001

Dear Mr Coventry

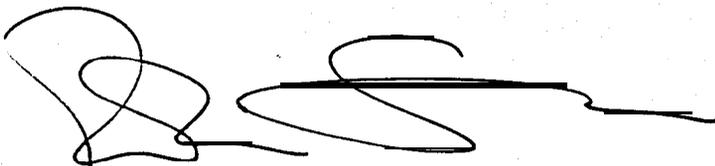
**FAO CONFERENCE-AND THE INTERNATIONAL UNDERTAKING ON
PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE**

I have been asked to reply to your letter of 29 October to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs about the International Undertaking on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture. Unfortunately your letter was received in DEFRA after the FAO Conference and only reached me in the last few days.

As you know, the FAO Conference adopted the International Treaty (IT) on PGRFA on 3 November. Prior to that final round of the negotiations, and before earlier rounds, we were most grateful for the active contribution the UK Food Group/UKabc made to the development of the UK line.

You make reference to a number of areas of weakness in the IT, and you will know that there is a considerable degree of convergence in our views. It is disappointing that, in the end we were unable, to negotiate a better result. That said, we must also recognise that this is the first legally binding international agreement in the area of sustainable agriculture. It also removes the uncertainty over the legal status of the collections of the International Agricultural Research Centres of the CGIAR. It has the potential to provide a significant contribution to the conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA and, in turn, to world food security. We must now work hard to implement it in such a way that this potential is realised.

Yours sincerely



MARTIN SMITH



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE