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ISA - Institut Sophia agrobiotech

Rapport Hcéres

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HCERES

High Council for the Evaluation of Research
and Higher Education

Department of Research Evaluation

report on research unit:

Institut Sophia Agrobiotech

ISA

under the supervision of
the following institutions
and research bodies:

Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique - INRA

Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique - CNRS

Université Nice Sophia Antipolis

Evaluation Campaign 2016-2017 (Group C)

HCERES

High Council for the Evaluation of Research
and Higher Education

Department of Research Evaluation

In the name of HCERES,¹

Michel Cosnard, president

In the name of the experts committee,²

Dierk Scheel, chairman of the committee

Under the decree No.2014-1365 dated 14 november 2014,

¹ The president of HCERES "countersigns the evaluation reports set up by the experts committees and signed by their chairman." (Article 8, paragraph 5)

² The evaluation reports "are signed by the chairman of the expert committee". (Article 11, paragraph 2)

Evaluation report

This report is the sole result of evaluation by the expert committee, the composition of which is specified below.

The assessments contained herein are the expression of an independent and collegial reviewing by the committee.

Unit name: Institut Sophia Agrobiotech

Unit acronym: ISA

Label requested: UMR

Current number: 2106

Name of Director (2016-2017): Mr Pierre ABAD

Name of Project Leader (2018-2022): Mr Philippe CASTAGNONE

Expert committee members

Chair: Mr Dierk SCHEEL, Leibniz Institute of Plant Biochemistry, Germany

Experts:

- Mr Matthieu ARLAT, University of Toulouse (representative of the CoNRS)
- Mr Jean-Luc LE QUERE, INRA (representative of supporting personnel)
- Mr Andrew LIEBHOLD, US Forest Servicen, Morgantown, West Virginia, USA
- Mr Gary LOAKE, University of Edinburgh, Scotland
- Ms Karen MCCOY, CNRS, Montpellier
- Ms Anne REPELLIN, IEES Paris (representative of the CNU)
- Mr Thierry SIMONNEAU, INRA, Montpellier
- Mr Elio SUCENA, Instituto Gulbenkian de Ciência Oeiras, Portugal

Scientific delegate representing the HCERES:
Mr Serge DELROT

Representatives of supervising institutions and bodies:

Mr Christian LANNOU, INRA

Ms Catherine RECHENMANN, CNRS

Head of Doctoral School:

Mr Thomas LAMONERIE, ED n°85, « Sciences de la Vie et de la Santé »

1 • Introduction

History and geographical location of the unit

The creation of an Agrobiosciences center in Sophia Antipolis results of a long process that first led to the recognition of the center of Sophia Antipolis by INRA in 2006, with a “Pôle de Santé des Plantes” (PSP, Plant Health Pole) that aimed to gather the local forces existing around this topic in a unique large research unit (TGU).

PSP was restructured in 2008, with the formal recognition of three units on the site of Sophia Antipolis. A large UMR, named “Interactions Biotiques et Santé Végétale” (IBSV, Biotic Interactions and Plant Health), was co-supervised by INRA, University of Nice Sophia Antipolis (UNS) and CNRS. The two other units named “Lutte Biologique” (UELB, Biological Control) and “Recherches Intégrées en Horticulture” (URIH, Integrated Research in Horticulture), were only affiliated to INRA.

During the next four-year contract, the scientific development of the three units was thus deliberately oriented towards convergence on shared projects. As a result of the last AERES evaluation in 2011, the three former units finally merged into a single UMR, named “Institut Sophia Agrobiotech” (ISA, Sophia Agrobiotech Institute) for the period 2012-2016.

Management team

Present contract:

director: Mr Pierre ABAD;

deputy directors: Ms Christine PONCET, Ms Marylène POIRIÉ;

Administrator: Ms Frédérique LAVIROTTE.

Future contract:

director: Mr Philippe CASTAGNONE;

deputy directors: Ms Frédérique LAVIROTTE.

HCERES nomenclature

SVE1 Agronomie, Biologie Végétale, Écologie, Environnement, Évolution.

SVE2 Biologie Cellulaire, Imagerie, Biologie Moléculaire, Biochimie, Génomique, Biologie Systémique, Développement, Biologie Structurale.

Scientific domains

The scientific domains covered by the unit include various aspects of plant/pathogen interactions and plant protection, from the molecular to the agro-system levels.

Unit workforce

Unit workforce	Number on 30/06/2016	Number on 01/01/2018
N1: Permanent professors and similar positions	15	15
N2: Permanent researchers from Institutions and similar positions	36	35
N3: Other permanent staff (technicians and administrative personnel)	80	78
N4: Other researchers (Postdoctoral students, visitors, etc.)	2	
N5: Emeritus	8	
N6: Other contractual staff (technicians and administrative personnel)	27	
N7: PhD students	38	
TOTAL N1 to N7	206	
Qualified research supervisors (HDR) or similar positions	31	

Unit record	From 01/01/2011 to 30/06/2016
PhD theses defended	35
Postdoctoral scientists having spent at least 12 months in the unit	28
Number of Research Supervisor Qualifications (HDR) obtained during the period	8

2 • Assessment of the unit

Global assessment of the unit

The unit focus on the characterization of molecular mechanisms, evolutionary processes, and population and environmental factors that affect interactions between plants and phytophagous organisms, pathogens and symbionts, as well as between insect pests, their symbionts and their parasitoids. The aim is to improve alternative crop protection methods, to ensure crop sustainability, to assess the risks associated with the introduction of new pests, and to promote environment-friendly agriculture.

The strength is the excellent combination of basic and applied research on crop plants in an ecological context with the focus on plant health aspects. The matrix-like organisation of the research teams around the scientific topics favors successful interdisciplinary collaboration between the different research teams although the interaction of researchers in different teams might still be improved to further stimulate interdisciplinary research.

The availability of different platforms to all research teams allows the application of omics technologies in these research areas.

The quality of the research is excellent and the unit is internationally visible in the field. It has developed several international and national research collaborations, but also provides support to local and third world agricultural practise. ISA is a partner or coordinator of numerous ANR or FP7 programs, and its research is well articulated with the socio-economic environment. The unit successfully launched quite a number of innovations during the reporting period, which covered a broad field of activities.

The involvement of ISA scientists in training and teaching activities is excellent with respect to involvement in master teaching and supervising of PhD students.

The 5-year plan is well-thought and ambitious (too much in some respects, owing to the personnel available), well grounded on the past achievements and evolution of the unit.