

Chapter XXXI

The CGIAR Virtual Library Bridging the Gap Between Agricultural Research and Worldwide Users

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ABSTRACT

This chapter introduces the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) Virtual Library as a tool for linking researchers and agricultural research results. The CGIAR is a strategic alliance of countries, international and regional organizations, and private foundations supporting 15 international agricultural centers that work in partnership with national agricultural research institutions and societies. The research results generated are numerous and cover a wide range of subject fields. While these are properly documented, locating relevant and timely information across the system's 15 centers is a long and tedious process as individual databases have to be searched. The CGIAR virtual library (CGVLibrary) project of the CGIAR Libraries and Information Services Consortium (CGIAR-LISC) was created in 2005 to address the difficulty of information retrieval across the various centers. It is now available via the WWW (<http://vlibrary.cgiar.org/>) and knowledge generated by the CGIAR can now be retrieved with a few mouse clicks.

INTRODUCTION: THE NEED FOR VIRTUAL LIBRARIES IN AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH

The application of information technology has made it possible to share knowledge more quickly and effectively than ever before. Access to global networks, electronic publishing, and the ensuing deluge of digital information are major trends impacting the world of information and knowledge management. New applications of the Internet have forever altered the way information providers respond to the needs of clients. Likewise, the latest brand of information technology and its diverse applications have spurred a new breed of information seekers, equipped with sophisticated computer skills and displaying a strong preference for electronic delivery of information and waning levels of patience for query response times.

Advanced capabilities of the Internet coupled with the vast expanse of digital information it carries bring significant challenges as well as opportunities. Information overload normally takes place when results returned from using Internet search engines become unmanageable, keeping the researcher distant from the desired information the user seeks. The ensuing frustration is compounded by the fact that a growing body of research information is available exclusively through commercial databases that remain closed to most public search engines, and require vast financial resources for purchasing access rights. Where databases are accessible, they may require search methods and interfaces that are unfamiliar to casual users, thereby hindering search and retrieval operations. In such a context, the need for systematic information management fully emerges (Krill, 2000), a task that becomes increasingly difficult with each advance in information technology and corresponding demand from end users.

Access to Agricultural Knowledge: Current Scenario

In agriculture, as in other professional disciplines, having access to the latest, high quality research information is more important than ever. New Web sites and Internet-accessible databases on specialized subjects, including agriculture, are launched each day, thereby making vast amounts of information available to a rapidly growing community of online users. Moreover, an increasing proportion of research information is now available in computer-readable format, either as original electronic documents or as digitized versions of hard copy publications. Meanwhile, much of the academic journal literature is also available electronically via the Internet, albeit usually through paid licenses.

Publicly available agricultural information resources are stored and managed by multiple and diverse systems. These include agricultural references in *Agricola*¹ that will not be found in AGRIS, as well as references in CAB International databases may not be found in either; hence, multiple searches may be required for each topic of interest, often through disjointed user interfaces. Moreover, many publications—particularly informal publications (i.e., gray literature, etc.) and those produced in developing countries—are unavailable on the Internet in any format whatsoever.

Researchers have often expressed frustration with the current process of locating and retrieving relevant research information. They demand quick and easy access to the latest, high quality research information to support their own research as well as disseminate research results as soon as they become available. Therefore, the task facing information managers (IMs) is to organize and make available targeted sets of information resources to both professional and nonprofessional

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Digital Library Service System; Digital Library System; Document Model; Grid Computing; Grid Infrastructure; Institutional Repository; Service Oriented Architecture

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