

The CORESTA congresses – leading edge science meets family spirit

Bringing people together to work on global issues, share studies and present scientific findings was the basis for the founding of the Cooperation Centre for Scientific Research Relative to Tobacco in 1956, culminating in congresses ever since.



CORESTA 2011, Graz, Austria

production and use: from field to leaf market, which is covered by the Agronomy and Phytopathology Study Groups (AP); and from leaf market to consumer use, which is dealt with by the Smoke Science and Product Technology Study Groups (SSPT). These two tandem groups hold meetings in separate venues on odd years – AP joint meetings attracting some 150 people, SSPT around 250 – and on even years, they all convene at CORESTA Congresses. When congresses coincide with the association's General Assembly, with elections for the renewal of the executive bodies, and the award of the CORESTA Prize acknowledging a senior scientist's life-long work in tobacco science, they are certainly “the place to be”, to keep pace with the latest news

And this goal has remained an essential part in the life of this association, gathering together scientists, researchers, developers, designers and more, all involved in the tobacco industry. In previous issues we looked at the organisation of the scientific work within CORESTA, through its four Study Groups. Considerable work is achieved by the various Sub-Groups and Task Forces, best described as being the part of the iceberg below water. The visible part includes documents, such as recommended methods, technical reports or guides, but also the annual CORESTA events, which are a date not to miss for the tobacco scientific community.

The four Study Groups address, by pairs, the two great stages in tobacco



CORESTA 2010, Edinburgh, UK



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Thomas Verron

on tobacco science, through a number of scientific presentations, posters, workshops and CORESTA working group reports.

Every year, CORESTA events offer the tobacco scientific community the opportunity for both high level communications and informal discussions, leading to fruitful exchanges and new initiatives. Although participating in the working groups of CORESTA is restricted to members of the association, these meetings are open to all interested persons who are welcome to attend or present papers and posters. For example, the US food and Drug Administration (FDA) regularly sends delegates to keep abreast of the latest research findings.

CORESTA's scope covers all aspects of tobacco life, from the seed –even the cell– to the smoke molecules, from agricultural practices to consumer behaviour. Because of this, such events are the perfect occasion for all stakeholders to learn from the scientific community, through the presentations, and to meet their peers from all parts of the world, may they be competitors, suppliers or customers, to exchange views about common issues. As Harrie Verschure (Agio Cigars) puts it succinctly: "I want to be there because I want to learn what is going on and be able to meet colleagues from other companies". One manager from a small laboratory reports: "I am always trying to educate myself on management techniques



Anne Jack

[from larger structures], how to improve laboratory efficiency and through-put".

Mutual respect is key

What is most striking at CORESTA events is that companies which are fiercely competitive on the commercial side, may, during these meetings, and without transgressing deontological rules, develop very friendly relations. Thomas Verron, a statistician at Imperial Tobacco, told us: "With my former job, I have attended conferences where presenters were heckled. No such thing here, people debate in an open spirit". Most delegates are very regular attendees, some being proud to say that they have not missed a meeting in years. And even if retirement is eminent, they believe they will still attend in the future "if it is not too far away from home, because it is an event I have been looking forward to every year" says a soon to retire delegate.

Pierre-Marie Guitton, CORESTA's Secretary General for two years now, says he was amazed to see how "these people from all over the world are happy to be here and see each other again". And when he visits premises prior to a meeting or Congress, he makes sure that, besides the regular conference room equipment, there is enough lounge space to share scientific information informally. But no commercial talk here,



Harrie Verschure

no advertising, no company names. "This is a place for science, not business" states a senior scientist, immediately adding "but with good opportunities for networking!" It is also the place where the old-timers will chaperon new scientists and make them feel at home with industry and its people. "Even though all sessions are not in my sphere of interest, I come because I learn also a lot during the breaks" mentioned one delegate.

At this point, one could gain the impression that CORESTA meetings are largely social events. As Harrie Verschure puts it: "On business trips, you will only see the airport, your hotel and a meeting room. CORESTA always provides a nice social programme, too. Even for the accompanying persons."

But the main objective of these events remains communication in scientific research related to tobacco. During 3 or 4 days, papers are presented at a rolling 20 minute rhythm, in addition to a poster session and panel-workshops.

Preparing such meetings takes time. From the theme of the event, a Call for Papers is unveiled in January, and scientists are invited to submit abstracts related to that theme and other tobacco related topics before the end of May. A Reading Committee will then read, select, and if necessary ask questions about the submitted abstracts, to make sure that they are scientifically sound, and bring novelty and interest to the community, which is the true aim. If ▶

you ask delegates if they learn something at each meeting, the immediate answer is: "Definitely yes" or "Yes. We need to continue learning about new scientific research that is presented." or "This is why we are ready to travel the planet!". One regulatory scientist from a paper company confirms: "If I were to reduce my traveling, CORESTA would be the last event I'd quit."

Sharing progress

All researchers involved in biology, chemistry, engineering, mathematics, or technologies, and any domain, know that progress is closely linked to publication. It is a golden rule to publish and communicate experiments and results, so that fellow researchers can capitalise on this work and go further, or sometimes be warned that such a direction leads to a dead end, so as to re-orientate their research. Similarly to other tobacco related events, CORESTA meetings bring science forward, adding the specificity of being global. While English is commonly used in the conference room, dozens of different languages

may be heard in the halls. Anne Jack (Univ. Kentucky), a member of the Reading Community, notes that "People from China have improved their English tremendously, understanding how much they had to gain by sharing their work with our community, and their contributions are really valuable. They have to learn from us, and we have to learn from them".

Naturally, learning is one of the main concerns in the scientific world. "Of course" says a self-described lab rat, "our whole life is dedicated to learning, and that's what CORESTA meetings are all about". When facing a problem, any individual needs someone to talk to, which is not always possible in the day to day professional environment, because of lack of time, lack of available expertise, deadlines.

Belonging to a community experiencing similar concerns is one important advantage reported by CORESTA members and other meeting attendees. One manager in a flavour company simply confesses: "We are a member, we do not participate much, but we are part of the CORESTA family and we know that if we have a question, we'll

find an answer". Harrie Verschure adds: "Yes, we are a relatively small company. Within the tobacco industry there is a lot of knowledge. Only by meeting with people will you learn from each other."

CORESTA describes its activities as a forum for research, information exchange and networking, all in a spirit of openness, collaboration and support. And its events are professional, both in their content and in the way they are organised. Elisabeth Wimmer, responsible for events at Tannpapier, who prepared the last "Smoke-Techno" meeting in Graz, Austria, in 2011, says "It was worth hosting this event, the delegates were friendly, and we were keen to provide them with our own best spirit". The CORESTA staff confirms and adds: "The global feedback we received is that there was a good balance of presentations, poster sessions and social time to meet all needs". No wonder delegates keep coming back.

The CORESTA Congress 2012 will be held in Sapporo, Japan, from 23 - 28 September. For more details visit www.coresta2012.org

William McEwen

British American Tobacco joins the Scientific Advisory Panel of the Institute of In Vitro Sciences, USA

British American Tobacco's (BAT) Group Research & Development (GR&D) Centre has become the newest member of the Scientific Advisory Panel of the Institute for *In Vitro* Sciences (IIVS), USA.

IIVS, which was founded in 1997, is a recognised leading provider of *in vitro* testing in support of toxicological safety evaluations. Rigorous scientific programmes coupled with educational and outreach initiatives have established IIVS as a global leader in the advancement of alternatives to animal testing. The Scientific Advisory Panel is comprised of representatives from companies and organisations eager to promote the use and acceptance of alternative methods to animal testing.

"We rely on the expertise of our panel

members to help determine the direction and focus of our scientific activities," said Dr. Rodger Curren, President of IIVS. "As companies such as BAT dedicate significant resources to the implementation and use of alternative methods, we assist them in evaluating the technology and introducing these methods to the regulatory community."

IIVS has on-going programmes with US agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency and the Food and Drug Administration to discuss how *in vitro* methods can be utilised in a regulatory setting. Since US-based companies seek harmonisation of the use of non-animal methods, IIVS participates with regulators and validation authorities worldwide.

British American Tobacco's GR&D Centre has

established an in-house research programme developing *in vitro* models relevant to a number of tobacco-related diseases such as cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), cardiovascular disease (CVD), oxidative stress and inflammatory disease processes.

"We fully support the development and application of *in vitro* methods as alternatives to limit the use of *in vivo* studies," said Dr. Marianna Gaca, BAT's IIVS Scientific Advisory Panel representative. "We hope the *in vitro* models we are developing will help facilitate the understanding of the biological effects of tobacco smoke and, in the future, help support the assessment of conventional and modified risk tobacco products," she said.

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