9 AGRIS, GLOBAL

Domain, community and database on agricultural open data

The International Information System of Agricultural Science and Technology, better known as AGRIS, claims to be the biggest agricultural domain in the world. Its roots can be traced back to 1974, as an initiative of 180 member countries of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations.

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Its main objective is to improve access and exchange of information related to agricultural research. It serves the information needs of developed and developing countries and has created a spirit of partnership as it works with all its users and supports their research needs. This makes AGRIS more than a simple repository of data, it also works as a network. In a collaborative approach it connects more than 150 institutions from 65 countries.

AGRIS provides worldwide coverage, offering users access to an enormous amount of open data and today its statistics are impressive; 400,000 documents from Latin America, 150,000 from Africa, 750,000 from Asia. It provides multilingual content covering 64 languages, with at least 10,000 resources for 26 languages. Despite its development over the last few years, AGRIS continues to have ambition and plans to be a global hub for agricultural research and technology information.

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Fabrizio Celli from AGRIS says, "AGRIS is not only technology and services, but also a community. There are 150 data providers, many of them constantly active to contribute to AGRIS from all over the world." As a web portal, it also acts as a web application that links users to web resources using the Linked Open Data methodology.

In the last couple of years it has adopted Linked Open Data technologies which allows AGRIS to create mashup-pages. A mashup page (see more detailed explanation, below) is a web page where an AGRIS resource is displayed together with other relevant knowledge extracted from external sources which is not part of the AGRIS database. "In this way, when a user is looking for a publication in AGRIS, they can have access to a lot of other resources available on the web, related to the same topic, such as other bibliographies, distribution maps, definitions and country information," explains Celli.

As a database it provides a multilingual bibliographic resource for agricultural science. Celli explains, "On the data side, this means also improving comprehensiveness. Behind all this, the most important aspect of AGRIS is the user: AGRIS is a service that wants to help users, it should be the platform that allows its users to do better their job."

AGRIS has also implemented a cross-language search facility, enabling users to look for data in their own language, retrieving results in all available languages. According to Celli this feature has two main advantages. Users can search in every language and retrieve relevant literature in English, a language that provides the widest variety of data. When there are no results in a specific language, users may find relevant results in a wide range of other languages. Celli has written an article explaining this facility (see link—Sources).

In the context of European data, AGRIS has implemented a process that discovers

web resources for agriculture, assigning a semantics that uses the AGROVOC thesaurus, linking back to AGRIS records. This enable the service to intelligently suggest linked activities to specific topics of interest to the end user.

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Returning to AGRIS' impressive service for agriculture, it delivers up to 8 million multilingual bibliographic references. It has 31,000 books, can access 286,000 conference papers, provides 5 million journal articles and shows upwards of 62,000 theses. In total it presently offers 1.3 million links in full text and has data from more than 150 partner organisations across the globe. This is a valuable tool for researchers and graduate students looking for references and bibliographies. Librarians and cataloguers link to AGRIS along with journal publishers and conference organisers. AGRIS also responds to government officers seeking reports on specific agricultural topics.

As to the focus of its bibliographic references, the domain concentrates on agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry, aquatic sciences and fisheries, and human nutrition. Beyond these specialisms, it interlinks to other kinds of information related to its main fields of expertise, such as statistics, maps and country profiles.

Sources:
http://agris.fao.org/content/about
http://agris.fao.org/agris-search/search.do?recordID=QM2008000025 (information on mashup)
http://aims.fao.org/activity/blog/focus-agris-multilingual-search (multilingual search facility)