

Finding information on Livestock and Environment: the AGORA initiative in Central Asia

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1 AGORA AND PARTNERS

The initiative AGORA (*Access to Global Online Resources in Agriculture*) began in autumn of 2003 with the goal of providing free or low-cost online access to major international electronic full-text journals in the field of agriculture and related life sciences. These journals are available through Agora to scientists, educators, students, extension specialists and other users in selected eligible countries.

Agora is coordinated by FAO of the United Nations and several partner institutions. Journals or full-text articles are provided by almost 30 publishers, and now comprise materials from almost 800 high-quality authoritative international scientific journals.

Publisher Partners:

Advancement of Science, American Physiological Society, American Fisheries Society, Annual Reviews, American Society of Plant Biologists, BioOne, Blackwell Publishing, BMJ Publishing Group, Botanical Society of America, CABI Publishing, Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Press, CSIRO Publishing, Elsevier, Lippincott, Williams & Wilkins, Massachusetts Medical Society, National Academy of Sciences, Nature Publishing Group, Oxford University Press, Society for General Microbiology, Society for the Study of Reproduction, Springer, Taylor & Francis, John Wiley & Sons.

Other Partners:

FAO - UN Food and Agriculture Organization, Cornell University, Albert R. Mann Library, Dept. for Internat. Development (DFID), UK, The Rockefeller Foundation, US Agency for Int. Development (USAID), World Health Organization (WHO), Yale University Library.

2 NAVIGATING AND STRUCTURE OF AGORA MENUS

Agora is a decentralized information system that enables information retrieval through a common platform. It is possible to use several user-friendly search menus to access information. Full-text serial resources can be accessed directly through alphabetic browsing. Most of the materials can be searched also with the help of a bibliographic database CAB Abstracts that is also a part of Agora.

2.1 Logging in

Browsing through Agora journals is possible without logging-in. Publishers' websites and abstracts of journal articles can also be accessed freely. Full-text or complete electronic articles and CAB Abstracts, however, are only accessible to eligible individuals at registered institutions. Institutions register just once to receive a username and a password. All students, faculty and staff at that institution can then use the same password at the same time. It is advisable that an institution chooses a person who will carry out the procedure of registration for the entire institution and who will then distribute the password to potential users. The registration only takes a few minutes.

2.2 Browsing through journal collections.

It is possible to electronically and alphabetically browse the collection of journals like a collection of journals in a library. It is also possible to search for specialized journals in a specific subject area, like Animal Science, Environment/Ecology/Natural Resources, Economics/Social Science, etc. Also, it is possible to access the journal collections of a particular publisher, e.g. Elsevier, Springer, Taylor & Francis, etc.

2.3 Specifics of retrieving full-text articles

Full-text articles are derived from many different journals published by different publishers. Therefore, a bibliographic layout or format of an article may differ from one publisher to another. Generally, most articles present a possibility of previewing a short abstract or summary to offer a general idea of the topics in an article. All articles can be opened in-full in a PDF format. As this may take some time it is practical to first have a preview of a summary or abstract. Some journals by some publishers also offer a possibility of a HTML format in-full. This format opens more easily and offers a better possibility to use selected passages in the text.

3 NAVIGATING CAB ABSTRACTS

CAB Abstracts is an internationally recognized database for the field of applied agriculture and life sciences, and provides article abstracts from thousands of international serials. CAB is an Agora partner and supporter, and offers a subset of its main database to Agora users. Some 80% of journals in Agora are covered by CAB Abstracts.

This set of CAB Abstracts is available through Agora home page. For technical reasons, however, users must log-out of Agora in order to search CAB Abstracts. This is a bibliographic database and offers access only to abstracts and not full-texts. After retrieving information of interest in CAB Abstracts users must then log-in back to AGORA if they wish to access these articles in full-text.

CAB Abstracts offer a variety of search possibilities using Boolean search syntax according to a field of interest of the particular end-user. Information can be searched, refined, and displayed according to different criteria, such as topic, fields, years of publication etc. It is possible to employ a keyword or thesaurus-based descriptor search.

Table 1: Number of records retrieved in Agora through CAB Abstracts with different terms:

Term	Records	Term	Records
animals	100.270	livestock	3.313
animal	57.530	farming	3.157
environment/environmental	31.247	irrigation	2.525
soil	29.810	horse or horses	2.402
pollution	13.207	grazing	2.332
cattle	8.743	pasture or pastures	2.219
farm or farms	7.339	arid or aridity	2.184
sheep	4.535	herd or herds	1.656
sustainable/sustainability	3.591	desert/deserts/desertification	1.197

4 APPLICABILITY OF AGORA IN CENTRAL ASIA

All countries in the region are eligible to obtain access to Agora, except for Kazakhstan and Russia. These two countries namely enjoy higher per capita income what excludes them from getting international support of this kind. Agora can also be used by the countries in the region of Caucasus, and some other Asian countries. It is also offered to most of sub-Saharan Africa, and a few countries in Central America.

In the next table we present a number of records which can be retrieved in the Agora-linked CAB Abstracts and which include the respective geographic terms for Central Asia. The number of records is relatively low so it should serve as an incentive for the authors and researchers in the respective countries to publish more articles in high-quality international journals in order to bring more international awareness regarding the region and its concerns.

Table 2: Number of records retrieved in Agora through CAB Abstracts with different geographic terms:

Country	Records	Country	Records
Mongolia	168	Turkmenistan	29
Kazakhstan	65	Kyrgyzstan	22
Uzbekistan	50	Tajikistan	15

5 SOME TECHNICAL ISSUES

Agora information system covers only recent and current electronic resources. It is therefore not possible to search for very old bibliographic information. There are for example 36.100 records available for the year 2005, and 25.000 records for the year 2000. The oldest records are from the year 1996 - only 23 records. Altogether there are now almost 210.000 articles retrievable through Agora-linked CAB Abstracts. This accounts for some 80 % of the Agora materials.

Electronic information systems offer a possibility of dynamic updates so the structure of Agora Web pages may occasionally get revised and modified. Also, some technical problems may sometimes occur both within the host systems and on the side of the end-users. Conditions of accessibility to some journals may change on account of the policy of a particular publisher.

Users need to take into consideration the issue of copy rights. Agora passwords are directly linked to the use in a particular eligible country. Users must therefore not communicate their passwords to their colleagues in non-eligible countries. Such a violation can be traced and can result in the entire country denied access for up to a week, until the problem is resolved.

It is allowed, however, to download or print the materials in sensible quantities, especially for educational intention, and also make copies for other members of an institution. Needless to say there exists an obligation of crediting particular resources (articles) while downloading or copying materials for citation purposes.

6 CONCLUSIONS

Agora materials comprise mostly English-language articles published in international journals. The topics and experiment localities, however, cover the entire world. As opposed to bibliographic databases, Agora offers an immediate possibility to access and download or print complete or full articles. These are usually very informative research and professional articles supplied with a number of tables or graphic presentations employing international scientific symbols. So even if some end-users of Agora services possess a weaker knowledge of English language they will still be able to comprehend the main points presented in an article.

Agora is in fact a superb information tool empowering professionals and researchers in less affluent countries to have virtually the same access to current information as the researchers in the most developed economies. It is true, however, that some advanced communication infrastructure is required, and preferentially broadband accessibility to the Internet, but Agora will also work with slower speeds, involving some more waiting. It is now up to the end-users and their institutions to seize the opportunities offered by Agora and its electronic library of almost 800 journals.

Agora is available at:

Agora CAB Abstracts are available at:

E-mail inquiries can be sent to:

<http://www.aginternetwork.org/en/>

<http://www.agora-cabi.org/>

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