Preface

The field of Microbiology encompasses highly diverse life forms—bacteria, archaea, fungi, protists, and viruses. They have a profound influence on all life on Earth: they play an essential role in the cycles of matter in nature, affect all biological environments, interact in countless ways with other living beings, and play a crucial role in agriculture and industry. The literature associated with Microbiology, of necessity, tends to be specialized and focused. For that reason, it is difficult to find sources that provide a broad perspective on a wide range of microbiological topics. That is the aim of *The Desk Encyclopedia of Microbiology*.

The concept behind this venture is to provide a single reference volume with appeal to microbiologists on all levels and fields, including those working in research, teaching, industry, and government. We believe that this book will be helpful, especially for accessing material in areas in which the reader is not a specialist. It is intended to facilitate preparing lectures, grant applications and reports, and to satisfy curiosity regarding microbiological topics.

The Desk Encyclopedia of Microbiology is principally a synthesis from the comprehensive and multivolumed *Encyclopedia of Microbiology*. Our intention is to provide affordable and ready access to a large variety of topics within one set of covers. To this end we have chosen subjects that, in our opinion, will be of greatest interest to the largest number of readers. Included are the most general chapters from *The Encyclopedia of Microbiology*, brought up to date and augmented with current references and related URLs. We have emphasized topics that are currently "hot" in the field of Microbiology, including additional chapters from other sources.

The result is a volume where coverage is extensive but not overly long in specific details. We believe this will be a most appropriate reference for anyone with an interest in the intriguing field of Microbiology.

Moselio Schaechter, 2003