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NEWS FROM THE EGYPTIAN SEED ASSOCIATION

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Seed is the foundation of agriculture and the international seed industry plays an increasingly important role in the global pursuit to ensure sustainable development and well being of our planet and its people in an environmentally responsible manner. The seed industry has always been one of the major contributors to sustainable food production for an ever-growing world population.

Egypt is at a turning point in its national and agriculture development. The per-capita income has increased over the years but there is rapid population growth and high rural-urban migration. Food required to feed the current population of 80 million people growing at the rate of 2.2% per year, should come from increased crop yields through intensive agriculture. High quality improved seed varieties are considered a key input in the Egyptian's government strategy of increasing agricultural production.

On field crops, there is a high demand for wheat seed which exceeds 224,000 tons while corn equates to approximately 31,000 tons, and rice is about 88,000 tons. Egypt is self-sufficient in the above 3 crops together with local cotton varieties.

Seed marketing and distribution is controlled by cooperatives and the private sector while the Principle Bank for Development and Agricultural Credits (PBDAC) has set focus on providing credit to the farmers. Seed is packaged in small woven polypropylene bags for almost all crops and seed plants. Both private and public seed producers distribute their seed through cooperative extension and licensed seed dealers.

The private sector has been dominant in production, import and distribution of vegetable

and forage seed. They have now gained a major share in the supply of hybrid maize, sunflower and sorghum seed. Private agencies now produce self-pollinated seed in crops such as wheat and rice. About 50-60% of the total seed produced in Egypt are by the private sector.



Seed field in Egypt

In 1998, private sector seed producers and traders formed the Egyptian Seed Association (ESAS), a non-profit organization to represent their common interests. Its goal is to create a liberalized and integrated seed industry conducive to private sector investment for the benefit of the Egyptian farmers, seed exports and agricultural development. ESAS long-term objectives are to:

- Improve the legal, regulatory and competitive environment in the seed sub sector.
- Adopt new technologies in seed production, processing, trade and quality control to expand farmer adoption of seed in agricultural and horticultural varieties.
- Establish an industry code of ethics and ensure member compliance.
- Expand ESAS's membership base to cover all seed related activities.

- Expand financial resources to carry out ESAS activities with the association playing a leading role in seed production and supply in Egypt.

Egypt is now a member of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) seed certification schemes for cereals, maize, sorghum and vegetables. The National seed trade association, ESAS is a member of International Seed Federation (ISF) and a founding member of the African Seed Trade Association (AFSTA). Egypt is also a founder member of the WANA seed network and plays a key role as it holds the chairmanship of its council and steering committees.

The Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) got the newly organized central administration for seed testing and certification (CASC), implements quality control, certification and law enforcement. CASC has five general directorates:

- Seed Measures and development
- Field Inspection Testing and retesting.
- Seed Testing affairs in the governorates.
- Gins & Oil mills.
- Seed Certification.

It will be responsible for variety registration and plant breeder's rights, seed certification (field inspection, testing, and control tests), seed law enforcement, licensing of seed producers, processors traders and dealers, and seed industry support and promotion.

WEST AFRICA SEED ALLIANCE WORKSHOP ON VARIETY RELEASE AND REGISTRATION

By Norbert G Maroya, WASA Coordinator

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A five-day regional workshop on variety release and registration in support of the creation of the West African Catalogue of Plant Species and Varieties was held in Bamako, Mali from September 1-5th. Representatives from fifteen Member States of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Chad and Mauritania attended the workshop. At the opening ceremony, introductory remarks were made by the ICRISAT Representative in Mali Bonny Ntare, the Iowa State University representative Joe Cortes, the Director General of INSAH Moustapha Amadou, and the USAID Mission Director in Mali Alex Newton before the official opening ceremony performed by the Hon.

Minister of Agriculture Professor Tiémoko Sangaré.

The workshop participants included national variety registrars from Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo. In addition representatives from the national seed trade associations of the five countries where WASA is being implemented also participated. Technical support was provided by scientists from AVRDC (3); CILSS/INSAH (2); IITA (1); WARDA (1); CORAF/WE CARD (1); CNFA (1) as well as ICRISAT (3). The workshop was facilitated by Joe Cortes and Adelaida Harries, both from the Seed Science Center at Iowa State University and the WASA Coordinator Norbert Maroya.



Group photograph of participants in the workshop

The objectives of the workshop were:

- Review, with the assistance of the crop breeders, the procedures for release and registration of varieties including the practical conditions for testing of distinctness, uniformity and stability (DUS) and values for cultivation and use (VCU) for candidate varieties.
 - Inform participants on the management of the West African Catalogue of Crop Species and Varieties, and provide training on variety registration procedures including those for the web-based catalogue.
 - Assist country representatives to finalize their country-specific procedures manuals for variety release and registration.
- Technical papers were presented by the breeders, which led to lively and fruitful

discussions on the DUS and VCU characteristics after each presentation. The workshop concluded with the following recommendations:

- 1- CILSS with assistance of WASA should fine-tune the DUS and VCU recommendations made at the workshop to provide simplified guidelines by November 1st.
- 2- CILSS in collaboration with WASA should provide the final template for the development of the national catalogues by December 31st.
- 3- With technical guidance from CILSS and WASA and resource support from ECOWAS; national governments should establish by 31st March 2009 functional national seed committees and national varietal release committees. Each member country should institute a functional national seed catalogue by June 30th 2009

The International Agricultural Research Centres thanked WASA for being invited to the workshop and they committed themselves to assisting in the implementation of the workshop recommendations. The closing address was given by Edo Lin the Chief of Party of the USAID funded Seed Project of WASA.

EASTERN AFRICA SEED COMMITTEE HOLDS ITS ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2008

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The Eastern Africa Seed Committee (EASCOM), which is a Committee of the Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa (ASARECA) under its Policy Analysis and Advocacy Program (PAAP), held its 4th Annual General Meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on July 31 – August 1, 2008. Participants from Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, DRC Congo, Ethiopia, Madagascar and Sudan attended the AGM (Only Eritrea was unrepresented).

The meeting was opened by the State Minister for Agriculture, Ethiopia and was also attended by the Executive Director of ASARECA, Dr Seif Ketema and USAID regional and country representatives.

The participants discussed progress of harmonization and rationalization of seed laws, policies and regulations in the region and

identified key obstacles that need to be addressed at the policy level to enhance seed trade in the region.

MALAWI APPROVES BIOTECHNOLOGY POLICY

Source: Africa Science News Service

Malawi has become the latest Sub-Saharan African country to approve a National Biotechnology Policy that aims at providing a framework for effective implementation of biotechnology programs and activities.

The Policy is in response to a study conducted in Malawi in early 2000 supported by the Africa Biodiversity Network (ABN) to establish the status of Genetic Engineering (GE), Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) and GE food aid in Malawi. The study found that genetic engineering in general and agricultural biotechnology in particular is only at a rudimentary level in Malawi, being confined to the second-generation order characterized by tissue culture and application of molecular markers within the University of Malawi.

The Policy was approved during a cabinet meeting chaired by President Bingu Wa Mutharika, who is also the Minister for Education, Science and Technology. In a foreword to the Policy, the President said his government recognized the pivotal role biotechnology can play towards economic growth and poverty reduction.

SADC MINISTERIAL TASK FORCE MEETS ON FOOD PRICES

Source: SADC Secretariat

<http://www.sadc.int/index/browse/page/93>

A SADC Task Force of Ministers of Trade, Finance and Agriculture met on 13 July 2008 in Lusaka, Zambia to discuss measures to mitigate the currently increasing food prices, the impending food crisis and ways to improve the food security situation in the SADC region. This Ministerial Task Force was set up by the SADC Heads of State and Government at the International Conference on Poverty and Development held in Mauritius on 20 April 2008. The Ministerial Task Force noted that prices of food commodities worldwide had risen sharply over the past couple of years and even more sharply from January 2007 to date. There are a number of factors that are believed to contribute to the observed increase in world food prices.

Key among them are the increasingly poor weather conditions, high energy prices, worldwide reduction in levels of food stocks, massive shift in crop cultivation towards bio-fuels, increased consumption of food in emerging economies such as India and China, commodity speculation, and inadequate investment in agriculture in recent decades. However, prices in the SADC region haven't risen quite as sharply as world prices, which provides for a window of opportunity for measures to be taken for minimizing future rises in food prices.

Current estimates show that the SADC region is expected to increase its cereal harvest by 18% compared to last year, which will result in significant increase in the regional food security situation. The Task Force observed that some Member States have food deficits while others have surplus cereals. Member States with surpluses could export to those with deficits thereby improving the overall food security situation in the SADC region. In this regard, the Task Force called for removal of temporary export bans on major food crops to enable those with shortfalls access.

The Ministerial Task Force came up with several measures the Member States and the SADC Secretariat should take in order to reduce current and future food crises in the region. Some of these measures include:

- Increasing the levels of investment in agriculture, including aligning national budgets to the 10% of national budgets agreed to by SADC Heads of State and Government in May 2004 at their Extra-Ordinary Summit on Agriculture and Food Security;
- Improving access to agricultural inputs especially fertilizer through the provision of temporary subsidies to smallholder farmers;
- Expediting the harmonization of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Standards measures and removal of non tariff barriers within the region;
- Encouraging financial institutions, banks, micro-finance institutions and NGOs to prioritize agriculture and extend credit to small scale farmers especially women and vulnerable groups;
- Introducing social security systems targeted at the vulnerable to cushion them from the impact of increased food prices;

- facilitating easy flow of information among Member States and with SADC Secretariat;
- facilitating the establishment of a Regional Food Reserve Facility; and
- creating appropriate incentives for private sector involvement in services related to agricultural and food security; and

The Ministerial Task Force also urged International Cooperating Partners and donors to keep and meet the aid they have committed to give developing countries through various fora. Finally, the task force encouraged Member States to explore and take advantage of both the increasing food prices and the rising demand for bio-fuels. This, they noted, is an opportunity for most African countries that are not fully employing their agricultural land and have high numbers of an unemployed labour force. The SADC Secretariat was directed to expedite the development of a regional policy on bio-fuels.

Upcoming events:

- **13th to 14th October 2008:** AFSTA Board of Directors' meeting, Mombasa, Kenya.
- **3rd to 8th November 2008:** ISF Congress Meetings, Haarlem, Netherlands.
- **9th to 13th November 2008:** APSA annual Congress 2008 in Hyderabad, India.
- **2nd to 6th March 2009:** AFSTA annual Congress in Cape Town, South Africa.

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Disclaimer:

The African Seed Trade Association takes every precaution in verifying the accuracy of information supplied by its Secretariat, but does not accept liability for errors, which may nevertheless appear in this newsletter. Submissions by contributors to the newsletter may not necessarily reflect the views of the AFSTA Secretariat, the Board or its members.

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