



AFSTA E-Review

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AFSTA CONGRESS 2014 ATTRACTED 303 DELEGATES

By Aghan Daniel



Delegates at the AFSTA Congress 2014 Opening Ceremony

The 14th African Seed Trade Association (AFSTA) Annual Congress 2014 held from 4th to 7th March 2014 at the Ramada Plaza Hotel in Tunis, Tunisia was a resounding success for the African seed industry.

Offering a solid framework for exchange between the major players of the African private seed sector, this key event brought together 303 delegates from 48 countries.

The delegates actively participated in the congress which proved to be a magnificent forum to explore more seed businesses and strengthen the network among the seed stakeholders.

In a speech read on his behalf by the Chief of Staff of the Minister, the Minister of Agriculture of The Republic of Tunisia, His Excellency Mr Lassaad Lachaal, emphasized on the importance of the seed sector in attaining food security in Africa. He called on the delegates to continue deploying their efforts to deliver quality seeds to farmers and to explore enormous trading opportunities.

The then outgoing AFSTA President, Mr. Jitu Shah, during his opening speech, noted that huge opportunities exist for expanding agriculture and boosting employment as well as foreign currency earnings in Africa. He added that AFSTA has a big and important role to play in this pursuit. He encouraged the delegates to recognize that together with AFSTA, they are one critical link in a chain where every link must be strong if the greater good is to be achieved.

The congress was preceded by a half-day workshop on "International systems to develop an enabling environment to provide food security and economic development by strengthening the seed sector" jointly facilitated by the International Seed Testing Association (ISTA), the Union for the Protection of New Plant Varieties (UPOV) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in which over 80 delegates participated.

The congress discussed various important items for the African seed industry with a view to analyzing the current situation and charting out the way forward for the seed sector development. The following topics were addressed during the congress:

- Mr. Riadh Gabsi of Tunisia Seed Trade Association gave an overview of the seed market in Northern Africa.
- Dr Joseph DeVries, Director of the Program for Africa's Seed System (PASS) at the African Green Revolution (AGRA) gave a presentation on developing the African seed industry with reference to the Alliance for African Green Revolution (AGRA).
- Dr James Onsando, Managing Director of Kenya Plant Health Inspectorate Service (KEPHIS) and Dr Evans Sikinyi, Executive Officer of Seed Trade Association of Kenya (STAK) gave presentations on mobilizing the seed stakeholders for collaborative actions to fight against fake seed.

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cont... AFSTA CONGRESS 2014 ATTRACTED 303 DELEGATES

- Mrs. Anke van de Hurk of the International Seed Federation gave highlights on the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture and the Nagoya Protocol and its impact on the African Seed Industry.
- Two special interest groups on “Vegetables” and “Field Crops” also made presentations on the work they had done since being launched during the previous Congress 2013 in Mauritius.
- Current status, trends and impacts of the Maize Lethal Necrosis Disease (MLND) in Eastern Africa was given by Dr James Onsando and Dr B.M. Prasanna of CIMMYT while Dr Tarima Kaher of Field Crops National Institute, Tunisia talked about the progress in the control of cereal foliar diseases through advanced seed treatment.
- Dr Denis Kyetere, the Executive Director of the Africa Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF) talked about access to agricultural technologies for a better food security in Africa.



Delegates busy making business at the training tables

All these presentations attracted full houses with the delegates actively contributing to the debates and discussions.

Several representatives of regional and international organizations attended the congress 2014 namely the International Seed Federation (ISF), Asia Pacific Seed Association (APSA), the International Seed Testing Association (ISTA), Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Union for the Protection of New Plant Varieties (UPOV), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Common

Market for East and Southern Africa (COMESA), West and Central African Council for Agricultural Research and Development (CORAF/WECARD) and United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

Seed companies had many delegates visiting their exhibition booths and the trading rooms which were extremely busy.

The AFSTA General Assembly 2014 chaired by the out-going President, Mr. Jitu Shah, elected the AFSTA Board with 13 members that will serve until the next General Assembly in March 2015. Mr Nicholas Goble from the South African Seed Organization (SANSOR) was elected AFSTA President and Mr Denias Zaranyika of the Zimbabwe Seed Trade Association (ZSTA) has become Vice President both of them for two years. This General Assembly also approved 9 new members who are Ultravetis E. A Ltd) – Kenya, Bayer East Africa – Kenya, The Lane Trading – Angola, Known-You Seed Co. Ltd – Taiwan, Euralis Semences – France, ICS – France, LimaGrain Group – France, Seed Processing Holland B.V – The Netherlands and Centum- India.

The congress ended with a sentiment of general satisfaction in all its aspects. The delegates looked forward to the next congress 2015, which will be held in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe from 3rd to 5th March 2015.



Chief of Staff of the Minister, the Minister of Agriculture of The Republic of Tunisia, His Excellency Mr Lassaad Lachaal, visiting exhibition stands at the Congress

AFLATOXIN PROJECT LAUNCHED IN EAST AFRICA COMMUNITY

By Catherine Njuguna

A regional project on aflatoxin control for the eastern African region has been launched.

According to the East Africa Community Deputy Secretary General in charge of Productive and Social Sectors Hon. Jesca Eriyo millions of people living in the East African region consume high and unsafe levels of aflatoxin through their diets on a daily basis, posing adverse health and economic effects along the food production and supply value chain, undermining efforts to improve nutrition and enhance agricultural production, and minimizing economic gains from agricultural products, especially for small-scale farmers.

“Through an inception workshop, key stakeholders were introduced to the components and implementation arrangements of the EAC Regional Project on Aflatoxin Control and Prevention and constituted the Regional Experts Working Group on Aflatoxins.”

“We need a holistic and multisectoral approach that encompasses Agriculture, Health, Trade, and Industry sectors in implementing this project at the national and regional levels.” concluded the EAC official.

The EAC regional project on aflatoxin will be implemented with financial support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The EAC will also work closely with IITA as a collaborating partner that will be responsible for technical backstopping.

Dr Victor Manyong, Director for IITA Eastern Africa hub based in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, noted that East Africa is one of the hotspots of aflatoxin contamination – it has all the right conditions that the natural occurring fungi that produce aflatoxins thrive in. This has led to the destruction of millions of tonnes of grains, leading to huge losses of much-needed income and food, and trade and with health consequences.

“Researchers at IITA have been researching on ways to control aflatoxins for the past decade—with considerable success—and we are very excited to be part of this project to share the knowledge and technologies we have developed and to support the East Africa Community to find sustainable ways to deal with aflatoxins”.

IITA will be responsible for developing the regional biocontrol aflatoxin program, technical papers, and policy briefs that will inform the development of an evidence-based EAC Regional Policy on Aflatoxin abatement. Technical papers will be generated in the areas of standards for food and feed, impacts on human and animal health, biocontrol and postharvest handling, alternative uses and disposal systems, economic impact on trade and a communication strategy.

REGIONAL INITIATIVE TO FIGHT AGAINST MAIZE LETHAL NECROSIS LAUNCHED

By Aghan Daniel

The rapid spread of Maize Lethal Necrosis (MLND) in Eastern Africa since September 2011 warrants significant reorientation of product development and delivery strategies, a leading scientist has said.

In a presentation made at the African Seed Trade Association Annual Congress 2014 in Tunis last month, Dr BM Prasanna, Director, Global Maize Program, CIMMYT, Nairobi noted that the disease is proving to be a hard nut to crack in the region given that scientists were still faced with the dilemma of whether the MLN in eastern Africa is only due to Maize chlorotic mottle virus (MCMV) plus Sugarcane Mosaic Virus (SCMV) or due to MCMV + any other member of Potyviridae in different countries.

He added that the scientists were still grappling to know whether there are any alternate hosts of MLN-causing viruses that are prevalent in the region and how best to control them.

“We cannot, for example, as at now determine which primary or most active insect-vectors are responsible for the spread of the disease,” he said.

We do not even know how frequent seed transmission of viruses occur, especially MCMV neither can they ascertain when is seed transmission most likely to happen.

He however said that answers to these questions could soon be found as the scientists have now adopted a regional approach to help fight the disease.

He cited the recent ASARECA-organized workshop on MLN (August 21-23, 2013) which helped in developing a regional strategy. The workshop was successful in reviewing the current efforts to address the disease and identify gaps and in identifying priority areas that need to be addressed that can further be developed into a proposal. Besides it developed a strategy and action plan to address MLN in ECA.

Among other strategies the scientists resolved to survey maize growing areas in May-June by KARI and Ben Lockhart of the University of Minnesota) to identify distribution of SCMV and MCMV; and to enhance diagnostic testing for MLN at KARI-Biotech.



ZIMBABWE'S VICTORIA FALLS TO HOST AFSTA CONGRESS 2015

By Daniel Aghan

It was double joy for Zimbabwean seed sector as the curtains of the 2014 African Seed Trade Association (AFSTA) Congress in Tunis fell, with the country winning the rights to host the 2015 Congress besides being elected the vice president of the network.

Making the announcement in Tunis during the 14th Annual Congress of AFSTA, the Secretary General of AFSTA congratulated the Zimbabwe seed sector players, led by Mr Denias Zaranyika for putting up a splendid bid which won the hearts of the AFSTA board.

After the announcement, Mr Walter Chigodora, the chairman of Zimbabwe Seed Trade Association (ZSTA) and his vice chairman, Mr Zaranyika received the AFSTA flag to signify acceptance of this honour from Justin Rakotoarisaona, the Secretary General of AFSTA and Mr Riadh Gabsi of Tunisia who led the organization of the 14th Congress in Tunis, Tunisia.

Mr Zaranyika told the gathering that the Zimbabwean Minister of Agriculture, Dr Made is upbeat about the March 2015 event given that Zimbabwe is one of the countries with effective seed systems on the continent and also the fact that the country's economy is largely driven by agricultural activities.

"We will work with the organisers and AFSTA to ensure that this Congress is a great success especially given our track record in hosting International and regional conferences," said Dr Made. The Minister of Tourism, Hon Walter Muzembe is also looking forward to this event from a tourism point of view.

The yearly gathering will be held at the scenic town of Victoria Falls from 3rd to 5th March 2015. According to the chairman of the National Organizing Committee, Mr Chigodora, they are aiming at bringing over 500 delegates to Victoria Falls.

The AFSTA Secretary General expressed optimism of record attendance when one looks at the venue. The Zimbabwean delegation marketed the event very well and

many who attended the Tunisia Congress said they will definitely come to Zimbabwe, he said.

Earlier, the board of management of AFSTA and the General Assembly voted unanimously to elect Mr Zaranyika as vice President of AFSTA.

According to the AFSTA Constitution, Mr Zaranyika is poised to ascend to the Presidency in 2 years' time from the current President, Mr Nicholas Goble of South Africa.

Past presidents of AFSTA include Mr Jitu Shah from Kenya (2012 to 2013); Mr Enock Chikava of Malawi (2011-2012); Mr Marcel Kanungwe, Zambia (2008-2009); Mr Mark Sachs, South Africa (2006-2007); Mr Raouf Ghariani, Tunisia (2004-2005); Mr Guy Blaise Satsa, Cameroon (2002-2003); Dr Nathaniel Tum (2000-2001).

In the just ended Tunis Congress, several representatives of regional and international organizations attended the congress 2014 namely the International Seed Federation (ISF), Asia Pacific Seed Association (APSA), the International Seed Testing Association (ISTA), Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Union for the Protection of New Plant Varieties (UPOV), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Common

Market for East and Southern Africa (COMESA), West and Central African Council for Agricultural Research and Development (CORAF/WECARD) and United States Agency for International Development USAID. The congress was billed the largest with 303 delegates in attendance from 48 countries.

Seed companies had many delegates visiting their exhibition booths and the trading rooms which were extremely busy. The two areas provided an opportunity to forge business relationships among the seed companies.

The Victoria Congress will be held amidst the background of the African continent's projected growth at an average 6% way above even the Asian or European economies. Resource and Agricultural output on the continent is on the increase.

The sad irony, according to the AFSTA outgoing President, Mr Jitu Shah, is that, despite the sheer numbers of people working in Africa's agricultural sector, the Continent is still unable to feed its growing population. Despite its immense potential to boost economic growth and cut poverty, agriculture has continued to perform dismally.



The AFSTA Flag being passed on from Tunisia to Zimbabwe



MALAWI CONTINUES STRIDES TOWARDS GM CROP RELEASES, DESPITE CHALLENGES

By Daniel Aghan

While Malawi has made strong progress in agricultural biotechnology research, limited capacity to deal with the processing of GMO research applications in Malawi stifles timely approval for the technology, a leading scientist has said.

According to Prof. Moses Kwapata of Lilongwe University of Agriculture & Natural Resources, the limited public awareness of the issues surrounding research and development of GM crops has not helped matters in the country's bid to commercialize GM technology.

"We need more concerted efforts to fight the two ills which besides misinformation, mistrust and rejection of research and development of GM Crops efforts by some segment of society, are really working against food security in this country," he added.

Prof Kwapata was making a presentation at the Sunbird Capital Hotel last week during the fifth Partners and Stakeholders' Coordination Meeting on Biosafety Capacity Development in Africa. The meeting was organized by the NEPAD Agency - African by Biosafety Network of Expertise (ABNE), IFPRI's Program for Biosafety Systems (PBS) and other Biotechnology and Biosafety Stakeholders.

He also cited heightened health, environment and trade concerns by some Government officials, public, private sector and non-governmental organizations as working against the adoption of the technology in Malawi.

"Even though these are the underlying threats to GM research in Malawi, underfunding of research and development of GM crops and outreach activities is another major headache," he observed.

The professor said that despite the challenges, Malawi will not look back in her efforts to attain food security through the application of GM technology.

He noted that confined field trials on insect-resistant, Bt cotton will continue in the 5 districts of Lilongwe, Salima, Balaka, Zomba and Chikwawa to assess the performance of Bt cotton in terms of control of bollworms, yield and quality of seed cotton and lint. This, he added, will lead to releasing the Bt trait and commercialization of farmer-preferred Bt cotton varieties.

He also said that the country will soon delve into research and development in new GM food crops targeting cowpea, maize, banana and cassava. For sustainability sake, the scientist said that capacity building and public awareness efforts will be continued as well as lobbying for financial and technical support from Government, Private sector and Development partners will be intensified and linkages and partnerships promoted.

16 NEW DROUGHT-TOLERANT MAIZE VARIETIES AVAILABLE IN AFRICA

Source: www.aatf-africa.org

Farmers in Kenya and the rest of Africa can now have access 16 new improved drought-tolerant maize varieties that are high-yielding in moderate drought conditions.

Some farmers from Eastern and Western Kenya planted one of the maize hybrids, WE1101, marketed under the brand name Drought TEGO™, during the October 2013 short rains.

The WE1101 is the first conventional maize hybrid (non-GM) of the Water Efficient Maize for Africa (WEMA) project coordinated by African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF).

According to the WEMA Project Manager, Dr Sylvester Oikeh, 72 tons of the WE1101 hybrid seed have been sold to farmers by licensed seed companies in Kenya.

The variety recorded an average yield of 4.5 tons per hectare during last season's (2013) traditionally drought stressed short rainy season compared to an average maize yield of 1.8 tons per hectare.

The variety, which is non-GM, is one of the hybrids developed using breeding lines from International Maize and Wheat Improvement Centre's (CIMMYT) Drought Tolerant Maize for Africa (DTMA) project.

In the meantime, AATF have announced the results of the lottery held on March 21 at their head office for allocation of seven hybrids. According to Dr Gospel Omanyua, the following were the results of the exercise,

"The event was attended by five seed companies who expressed satisfaction of the process as being free and fair," he observed adding that three other hybrids WE1259, WE1203 and WE2109 will be available to all interested seed companies on non-exclusive terms soon.

Seed Company	Number of hybrids	Hybrid
Elgon Kenya	2	WE2106, WE2108
East African Seed Co.	1	WE2110
Ultravetis East Africa	2	WE2111, WE2107
Leldet Ltd	1	WE2101
Olerai Ltd	1	WE2104
TOTAL Hybrids allocated	7	



NEW TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPED TO INCREASE SEED QUALITY

By Daniel Karanja

Seed growers and the seed industry will soon efficiently dry seeds if a new technology currently being tested comes into use. The technology will also enable them to store seeds in moisture-proof packaging to preserve their quality for long periods (up to years) at ambient temperatures.

Known as Drying Beads, the technology is currently undergoing an international demonstration in Kenya and Tanzania.

“This technology is an alternative to sun or heated-air drying and uses desiccants to absorb moisture from seeds,” says Dr Daniel Karanja of CABI, Nairobi.

According to Dr Peter Jackson of Tanzania Official Seed Certification Institute (TOSCI), preserving seed quality is a major problem in tropical and subtropical regions, where the combination of warm temperature and high ambient relative humidity (resulting in high seed moisture content) causes rapid deterioration and loss of seed viability.

“In actual sense,” says Dr Razia Sultana of Department of Seed Science & Technology, Acharya N. G. Ranga Agricultural University, India, seed longevity is reduced by nearly half for every 1% increase in seed moisture content or 5°C increase in temperature, and the effects are additive.” For example, seeds stored at 10% moisture content and 30°C will last only one-quarter as long as seeds stored at 9% moisture content and 25°C. When seeds are stored in warm, humid conditions,

they lose quality and viability rapidly and perform poorly when planted.

“This technology seeks to ensure we attain excellent seed quality,” he added.

He noted that Drying Beads® has been developed by Rhino Research in Thailand to address this scenario.

Drying Beads® is being demonstrated in an international collaboration with the University of California, Davis, and including CABI Africa in Nairobi, Kenya, and TOSCI in Morogoro, Tanzania, supported by U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Horticulture Innovation Laboratory project.

The Drying Beads will absorb water (up to 25% of their weight) from the air and hold it tightly when enclosed in a container with the seeds, removing water from the seeds and drying them to low moisture content for safe storage. The beads can be reactivated repeatedly by heating to release the absorbed water and reused indefinitely without losing their effectiveness. Simple, inexpensive methods are also available for monitoring seed moisture content by measuring equilibrium relative humidity in storage containers or plastic bags.

Furthermore, simply drying seeds can prevent insect infestation and growth of fungi (and production of mycotoxins) in storage without pesticides.

Implementation of this “dry chain” to dry and store seeds in humid climates could greatly improve seed quality and extend viability.

GHANA STRIVES TOWARDS FORMATION OF TRADE ASSOCIATION

By Daniel Aghan

Players in the seed sector in Ghana have begun meetings which aim at the formation of an association of seed traders in the country.

The association to be known as Seed Trade Association of Ghana (STAG) began holding meetings last month with an aim of enhancing trade in quality genuine seeds.

During the last AFSTA Congress, the delegates heard that one of the setbacks in the war against low quality seeds in West Africa is lack of strong voices from the seed sector in the region. According to a CORAF official, Mr Yacouba Diallo, their organization had conducted research which showed that a number of seed associations in the region are weak and hardly hold meetings and this needed to be addressed if their capacities were to be built. The report stated in part that for this situation to be reversed, there needs to be concerted efforts by the seed companies to hold regular meetings to chart way forward for seed sector in their respective countries.

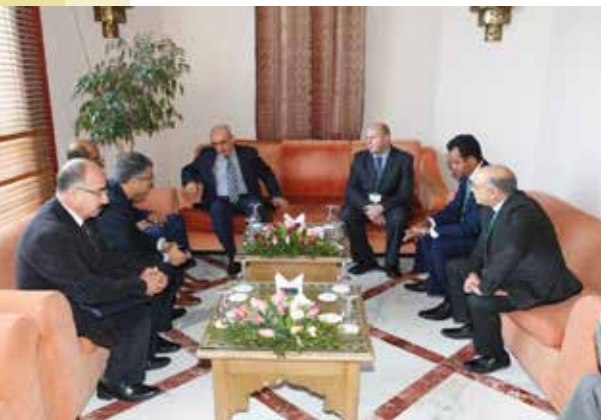
AFSTA wishes the new born baby, STAG and its handlers well so that it can grow like a yam tendril planted during the rainy season.



Maize grains stored for 5 months in porous bags (left) or with Drying Beads in hermetic packages (right). The grains stored in porous bags suffered insect and fungal damage under ambient high humidity conditions, while bead-dried grains were preserved without pesticides or refrigeration.



AFSTA CONGRESS 2014 PICTORIAL







**COMING SOON
AFRICAN SEED MAGAZINE**

The African Seed Traders Association (AFSTA) will be launching its first magazine called AFRICAN SEED in March 2015. We will call for articles for this magazine and there will be a good opportunity to advertise. A more detailed communication will be sent to you in due course.

AFSTA WEB ADVERTISEMENT

This is a reminder that AFSTA Secretariat is offering online an advertising opportunity for all members on a first-come first-served basis as the advertisement slots are limited. Your logo will be placed at the top right hand side and will flash alternately as it currently is currently on the AFSTA website (www.afsta.org) Your logo will be linked to your website or if you want to advertise a particular product you can send us artwork to be linked to your logo. The cost of the website advert is US\$ 250 for a period of one year.

UPCOMING EVENTS

1. ISF Congress 2014, 26 - 28 May 2014, Beijing, China
2. APSA Congress 2014: 10-14 Nov. 2014, Macau, China
3. AFSTA Congress 2015: 3-5 March 2015, Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe

EDITORIAL:

- Aghan Daniel, Communication and Advocacy Officer
- Charles Nyachae, AFSTA IT and Logistics Officer

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Contacts:

AFSTA Secretariat
Tel: +254 - 20 - 242 9017
E-mail: afsta@afsta.org
Website: www.afsta.org

