

## TUNISIA SET TO HOST THE 14<sup>TH</sup> AFSTA ANNUAL CONGRESS 2014

In the history of AFSTA, Tunisia is the country that has ever hosted the AFSTA Annual Congress twice. The National Organizing Committee for the AFSTA congress 2014 has worked tirelessly to make sure that it will meet the expectations of the delegates like the other previous AFSTA annual congresses. It will be held at the Ramada Hotel located by the sea at the outskirts of the beautiful town of Tunis from 4<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> March 2014.

Tunisia also has many tourist attractions and the delegates will be able to combine leisure and business while traveling to Tunisia.

Among Tunisia's tourist attractions are its cosmopolitan capital city of Tunis, the ancient ruins of Carthage, the Muslim and Jewish quarters of Jerba, and coastal resorts outside of Monastir. Generally, Tunisia is known for its golden beaches, sunny weather and affordable luxuries. The registration for the Congress will open by the beginning of November 2014.



And so, as all roads lead to Tunis for the 14<sup>th</sup> AFSTA Congress, it is time we learnt a little bit about agriculture of Tunisia. In this country, agriculture is the mainstay of the economy. The agricultural sector employs 16% of the total labor force. It contributes 12% on average to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The country's geographical location vis-à-vis Europe allows that its products easier the European market. In addition, the fact that it lies on the crossing point between Eastern and Western basins of the Mediterranean makes it a cut above the rest. Of its total surface area of nearly 162 000 km<sup>2</sup>, 10 000 km<sup>2</sup> is reserved for agricultural purposes. Interestingly, 75% of farms are smaller than 10 hectares.

The cereal sub-sector remains one of the most important sectors of agricultural production in Tunisia. In rainy areas where conditions are favorable, durum wheat is preferred to any other grains. In less favorable areas (arid and semi-arid), barley manifests superiority of its adaptability and its ability to provide an acceptable level of production despite difficult conditions. The wheat represents only 9% of the



Secretary General of AFSTA with the UTICA team in Tunis, Tunisia

area. Yields vary depending on the season and this variation is mainly due to climatic fluctuations, particularly rainfall.

Known for its extensive orchards of citrus, apples and pears, almond and date palm oasis,

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Tunisia produces and exports a wide range of fruits. However, the leading exported products remain olive oil/citrus (maltese) and dates.

Fresh vegetables occupy about 152 000 ha per year spread over 90,000 farms. The average of total production is around 2.9 million tons/year during the last five years, which is equivalent to 16% of the agricultural production and 28% of the crop production.

To meet the requirements of Tunisian and European consumers, significant efforts have

been made in improving quality and productivity to increase the competitiveness of exports to international markets.

Exports of horticultural products have increased almost 8 fold during the last ten years. They increased from 6,900 tons during the 2000/01 season to 55,000 tons in 2009/10. Most exports concerned four products (tomato, watermelon, potatoes, and salad). The main destinations are France (45%), Italy (23%) and Germany (9%).

The annual seeds requirement in Tunisia is estimated at 248,000

tons. More than 90% are met through domestic production. Importation remains dedicated to some varieties of hybrid seeds, legumes and potatoes.

The challenges faced by the seed sector call for the strengthening of the sector through upgrading seed production of seed companies, use of the results of scientific research by farmers, the organization of the sector and the establishment of partnership projects in the field of production of seeds and seedlings with specialized foreign companies.

## NATIONAL AND REGIONAL SECRETARIES' SEED ASSOCIATION MEETING

Traditionally the secretariats of the national and regional seed associations meet twice a year, once during the so called "spring" meetings, and once during the annual ISF World Seed Congress. This "spring" meeting of 14<sup>th</sup> March 2013 in Copenhagen saw of a good attendance of 26 participants. The outcome of a survey on communication materials was discussed as well as membership eligibility. In a previous meeting, outreach to government officials had been identified as a topic that was well under control for some associations, but certainly not for all. In an attempt to provide more associations with some guidance on how to go about it, two presentations had been scheduled by the Dutch and US associations.

ISF will not be expanding into the potato sector any time soon as a survey among ISF

members had indicated that there was very little interest in such an expansion. Mrs. R. Ranganathan, Mr. P. Sismondo and Mr. M. Bruins from ISF Secretariat presented an update on their activities with the different stakeholders and opened the floor up for discussion. The opinions that were shared indicated that the interactions between the ISF Secretariat and the seed

associations were very good. The associations appreciated the visits by the ISF Secretariat to their national events. Increased participation from associations that normally don't come to ISF meetings is needed. The participants agreed with an increase of the base fee multiple for associate members from 0.34 to 0.5 for category 1 and from 0.84 to 1.0 for category 2.



## UGANDA, KENYA SET TO RELEASE NEW MAIZE VARIETIES FOR THE MARKET

**F**armers in Kenya and Uganda could soon start growing conventional drought-tolerant maize once they are approved for commercialization by the respective regulatory authorities.

This follows several advanced field trials that have been held to test the maize varieties in Embu, Machakos, Naivasha, and Kakamega in Kenya and Kasese in Uganda.

Dr Sylvester Oikeh, the project manager, Water Efficient Maize for Africa (WEMA), said one line of the crop is at the final stage of approval and more than 25 others are at different stages of the national performance trials in Kenya compared with eight lines in Uganda.

"The varieties have been undergoing field trials in various parts of Kenya since 2009 and will be available to farmers during the 2013 short-

rains season subject to final approvals from the Kenya Plant Health Inspectorate Service," he said.

He added that like many other countries in Africa, Kenya and Uganda are affected by drought conditions and thus the new maize varieties will help farmers counter the effects that affect their yields.

Maize is the most widely grown staple crop in East Africa.

It is also an important animal feed. According to the National Agricultural Research Organization (NARO), per capita total maize consumption ranges from 28 kilogrammes a year in Uganda to 125 kilogrammes a year in Kenya.

However, the yields remain low, fluctuating around 1.5 tonnes per hectare in Uganda and 2.3 tonnes per hectare in Kenya, due to a combination of factors including drought, pests and diseases.

Dr Godfrey Asea, team leader of Cereals Programme at the National Crops Resources Research Institute, said the drought-tolerant maize in Uganda will either be released to farmers at the end of this year or early next year.

"So far, we have made progress because we now have a number of crops (maize) in the pipeline for release of about eight hybrids lines. They are in the final stages of testing and we hope that the exercise will be completed this year and apply for the release either late this year or early next year," Dr Asea said.

He added that the release of the new maize variety to the farmers will solve the effects of drought that affects the crops during flowering. Uganda's Agriculture Seeds and Plant Act requires research institutions to apply for a release of planting materials to the National Plant Variety Committee.

## NEW WHEAT VARIETIES FOR IRRIGATED LOWLAND AREAS OF ETHIOPIA

**E**thiopia produces wheat extensively under rain-fed conditions with a national average yield of up to 2 tons/ha. In 2006, more focused research on irrigated wheat was re-started at Werer Agricultural Research Center (WARC) under the Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research (EIAR). Wheat is one of the potential cereal crops

for irrigated areas that best fits as a rotation crop after cotton during the cool season in Afar and Somali Regional States, eastern Ethiopia. WARC had received promising lines from ICARDA through the CWANA Low Latitude 5<sup>th</sup> Irrigated Areas Spring Bread Wheat Yield Trial and tested them at Werer and Gewane in Afar Regional State for two crop seasons from

2010/11 to 2012/13.

The National Variety Release Committee (NVRC), during its annual deliberation on 23 May 2013, released two bread wheat varieties, Adel 6 and Nejma-14. These varieties have high yield potential, heat tolerance, and moderate tolerance to salinity. They are recommended for the irrigated

## ... cont. NEW WHEAT VARIETIES FOR IRRIGATED LOWLAND AREAS OF ETHIOPIA

lowland areas of Afambo, Amibera, Awash-Fentale, Asaita, Dubti, and Gewane in Afar Region, and similar areas.

EIAR is building on its experience of accelerated seed multiplication to make these varieties available to farmers in lowland irrigated areas within the shortest possible time through its scaling-out program.



*On-farm variety verification trials of two bread wheat varieties by Werer Agricultural Research Center in 2012/13*

## FARMERS IN 20 COUNTRIES GET OPPORTUNITY TO INCREASE YIELD

Efforts to transform agriculture in Africa have received a boost as more than 60 researchers and partners met under the Support for Agricultural Research and Development of Strategic Crops (SARD-SC)'s event "Partners, Possibilities and Prospects" on 15 July 2013 at the 6<sup>th</sup> African Agricultural Science Week in Accra. The SARD-SC project will raise the productivity of maize, cassava, wheat, and rice by 20% in twenty selected countries in Africa.

The plan is to reduce food importation from other continents and offer farmers better access to markets, improve livelihoods, and tackle poverty through enhanced capacities of beneficiaries to sustainable development in the region.

About a million farmers will directly benefit from the project through its innovations basket, while another million and half

will be reached by project spin off effects. "Narrowing the yield gap is key for African farmers, and it will help them to compete globally and to feed themselves," says Project Coordinator of SARD-SC Chrysantus Akem from the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA).

About a million farmers will directly benefit from the project through its innovations basket

Funded by the African Development Bank with US\$ 63.24 million, SARD-SC also aims to create knowledge on the tested innovations with farmers in Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, DR Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya,

Lesotho, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

IITA is one of the world's leading research partners in finding solutions for hunger, malnutrition, and poverty. Its award-winning research for development (R4D) approach addresses the development needs of tropical countries. IITA works with partners to enhance crop quality and productivity, reduce producer and consumer risks, and generate wealth from agriculture. IITA is a non-profit organization founded in 1967 and governed by a Board of Trustees. IITA works on the following crops: cowpea, soybean, banana/plantain, yam, cassava, and maize. IITA is a member of CGIAR, a global agriculture research partnership for a food secure future. The SARD-SC project is being co-implemented by three Africa-based centers under CGIAR and executed by IITA.

## NITROGEN-USE-EFFICIENT MAIZE READY FOR RELEASE IN AFRICA

Public and private maize breeders and seed providers in Africa can now test their lines and hybrids under controlled stress conditions that allow them to check on performance when grown by farmers. The latest results from regional maize stress screening trials and other important topics formed the agenda of the annual meeting of the Improved Maize for African Soils (IMAS) project, which during 10-12 July 2013 drew more than 70 participants to its Nairobi venue, including representatives from CIMMYT, which leads the project, key partners DuPont Pioneer, the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI) and South Africa's Agricultural Research Council (ARC), from African seed companies, from organizations like One Acre Fund, and from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

"There's been great interest from private companies to test their germplasm in our regional trials," said acting project lead and CIMMYT maize breeder Biswanath Das, who cited the project's stress screening networks as an unprecedented achievement in the region. "The 2012-13 trials included 114 maize lines and hybrids from 13 partners, including 6 companies that were tested at 40 locations region-wide. Trial environments include nitrogen-depleted soils and controlled drought stress, closely replicating actual farm conditions."

In the most recent results, yields of elite hybrids from the project match or marginally surpass those of the best widely-grown



*A trial showing nitrogen use*

commercial hybrids in favorable circumstances, while significantly out-yielding them under drought and low-nitrogen conditions, according to trial coordinator and CIMMYT breeder Amsal Tarekegne. "We expect that, through this network, all seed available to farmers will eventually feature higher yields under all conditions that farmers face."

Launched in February 2010, IMAS is developing maize varieties that better capture the small amount of fertilizer African farmers can afford, and that use the nitrogen more efficiently to produce grain. The project is using molecular markers and transgenic approaches to augment conventional breeding. The varieties are Africa-adapted and will feature added traits like drought tolerance, disease resistance, and preferred grain quality.

Conventionally bred IMAS-derived maize seed is near ready for national testing, certification, and release. Discussions and efforts now center around how best to spread awareness among seed providers and farmers and how to market seed. Meeting participants visited several Kenya

field sites, including KARI's Kiboko research station, where in partnership with KARI, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and CIMMYT are supporting construction of a maize doubled haploid breeding facility expected to be operational in late 2013. Recently recruited CIMMYT molecular geneticist Michael Olsen, who is taking up coordination of IMAS, thanked everyone for the warm welcome he'd received. "I'm really excited about working in this project," he said. "The energy coming from the meeting was tremendous."

Project oversight committee members, Zimbabwean researcher Idah Sithole-Niang and retired maize physiologist Greg Edmeades, as well as Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation program officer Gary Atlin, expressed their pleasure at the progress to date. "Low productivity due to poor soil fertility is the greatest challenge to African agriculture," said Atlin. "Breeding is one way to address this. Thanks for your superb efforts."

## PARTNERSHIP VISIT BY THE PRESIDENT AND THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF AFSTA IN DAKAR SENEGAL

The President and the General Secretary of AFSTA, Mr. Jitendra Shah and Mr. Justin Rakotoarisaona respectively, recently visited the management of West and Central African Council for Agricultural Research and Development (WECARD) and profited by this opportunity to closely look at the establishment of the AFSTA West Africa Regional Office in Dakar, Senegal. The Chairman of the Committee on "West Africa", Mr. Amadou Djigo, and Mr. Amadou Sarr, General Manager of Tropicasem and also member of the aforesaid committee, accompanied them during the working session with the WECARD team composed of its Executive Director, Dr. Harold Roy-Macauley, the Acting Director of Programs Dr. Ousmane Ndoeye, the West Africa Seed Program (WASP) Chief of Party, Dr. Ernest Asiedu and other WECARD staff.

The main objective of the visit was to strengthen the cooperation between the two organizations especially in the framework of the implementation of the USAID-funded West Africa Seed Program (WASP) and to fine tune the establishment of AFSTA West Africa Regional Office (AFSTA-WARO) in Dakar, Senegal.

The AFSTA and WECARD jointly paid a courtesy call to the Senegalese Minister of Agriculture and Rural Equipment, Hon. Abdoulaye

Balde. At the meeting the Minister was informed of the role and functions of WASP in improving the supply of quality seeds in West Africa, through (i) alliance building to effectively coordinate the seed system, (ii) effective implementation of the ECOWAS seed regulations, (iii) increased supply of quality breeder seeds and (iv) support to quality foundation and certified seed supply. In Senegal, WASP is partnering with WAAPP (West Africa Agricultural Development Program), (Senegalese Institute for Agricultural Research (ISRA), the Private Sector and other stakeholders, including Hub Rural, USAID-Bilateral, etc. He was also briefed on the role of AFSTA-WARO in strengthening the organizational capacity of the National Seed Associations and the agribusiness capacity of the private seed sector as well as the modalities for the establishing the office for the implementation of WASP activities related to private sector capacity.



LR: Mr. Amadou Djigo, Senegal Minister of Agriculture and Rural Equipment, Hon. Abdoulaye Balde, Mr. Jitu Shah, Dr. Ernest Asiedu & Mr. Justin Rakotoarisaona

### UPCOMING EVENTS

1. Media for Environment, Science, Health and Agriculture in Kenya (MESHA) Congress: 25 - 27 Sept 2013, Nairobi, Kenya
2. European Seed Association Annual Meeting: 13 - 15 October. 2013 - Warsaw, Poland
3. World Food Day 2013: 16 October, 2013
4. Africa Rice Congress 2013: 21-24 October - Yaoundé, Cameroon
5. 2nd STAK Annual Congress, Nairobi, Kenya: 6-8 November 2013
6. APSA Annual Congress 2013: 18-22 November, 2013 Kobe, Japan

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#### **Disclaimer:**

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