

AFSTA congress 2024 another resounding success

By Aghan Daniel I AFSTA Communication Officer | daghan@afsta.org

The 24th African Seed Trade Association (AFSTA) Annual Congress, which ended on March 6, 2024 was yet another memorable gathering of the seed sector in the region.

The fair held at PrideInn Paradise Beach Hotel & Resort in Mombasa, Kenya, was attended by 300 delegates representing seed traders and producers from various regions of the world.

The Guest of Honour, Hon Mithika Linturi Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development, commended AFSTA for continuously organising the seed fair, which has enabled seed men and women get opportunities to strengthen their seed business relationship and at the same time debate on important topics on the seed industry.

He noted that through the congress and AFSTA's work, farmers had gained access to innovative technologies which have enhanced productivity and ultimately bolstered food and nutrition security.

Hon Linturi also praised AFSTA for the role it has played in the establishment of the regional harmonised seed regulations in the continent.

On his part, the immediate past President of AFSTA, Dr Kulani Machaba, said that the seed sector in Africa needs to position itself to exploit the \$4.18b project worth of the sector by 2030. He reminded the delegates that the sector was currently growing at an annual rate of Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 5% (2024). He added that there was need to grow the number of farmers who have access to certified seed as the number currently stood at 23% of smallholder farmers in COMESA have access to improved varieties.

He also observed that some challenges still persist such as low investment in research and development targeting new varieties; long variety registration periods and weak funding of public research institutes, distinctiveness, uniformity and stability testing stations which he said needed to be overcome through joint efforts.

“The Kenyan seed sector celebrates the milestones achieved within the regulatory space. The anchor regulator has opened the space for responsible self-regulation among private sector players. Building efficiency around this noble step is critical as it creates the platform for connectivity in tracking quality and building sustainability as we work to ensure the farmer

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The Guest of Honour at the 24th AFSTA Congress, Hon Mithika Linturi Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development.

accesses to high quality seed,” said Chairman of the National Organising Committee (NOC), Mr. Wellington Wasike.

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The congress was preceded by a half-day workshop on seed treatment sponsored by Seedcare Syngenta the main sponsors of the Congress, which will tackle, among other issues Victrato – the nematicide seed treatment technology; Biologicals – the helping hand seed treatment technology and Fortenza duo – the fall armyworm & cut worm technology

The Congress also saw the change of button at the Board level where Mr Amadou Sarr of the Senegalese Seed Association (UNIS) was elected the new President of AFSTA with his Vice being Mr Clive Mugadza of the Tanzania Seed Trade Association (TASTA). Dr Kulani becomes the past President and will continue serving on the Board for two more years.

The following is the full list of the AFSTA board:

NAMES	ORGANIZATION	COUNTRY	POSITION
Ordinary Members			
Mr. Amadou Sarr	UNIS	Senegal	President
Mr. Clive Mugadza	TASTA	Tanzania	Vice-President
Mr. Kulani Machaba	SANSOR	South Africa	Past-President
Mr. Innocent Namuhoranye	NSAR	Rwanda	Member
Mr. Nessimu Nyama	STAM	Malawi	Member
Mr. Ahmed Ouayach	FNIS	Morocco	Member
Mrs Sylvia Horemans	ZASTA	Zambia	Member
Mr. Raman Sehgal	ESIA	Egypt	Member
Mr. Narcis Tumushabe	USTA	Uganda	Member
Ms Nathalie Issorat	SEMAGRI	Cameroun	Member
Associate Members			
Mr. Charles Miller	ASTA	USA	Associate member
Mr. Nicolas Perrin	SEMAE	France	Associate member

Several representatives of regional and international organizations participated at the Congress 2024. The next Congress will be held in Kigali, Rwanda from 3rd to 5th March 2025.

DR Yacouba Diallo is the new AFSTA Secretary General

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Dr. Yacouba Diallo
President | AFSTA

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The African Seed Trade Association Board has appointed Dr Yacouba Diallo, a seed expert, as the new Secretary General effective April 1, 2024. The announcement was made by the Board President, Dr Kulani Machaba the AFSTA Annual Congress held last month in Mombasa, Kenya.

Dr Yacouba, a Burkina Faso citizen, replaces Mr Justin Rakotoarisaona from Madagascar who has been at the helm of the association for nearly two decades.

Until his appointment, Dr Yacouba was the Project Manager, West and Central Council for Agricultural Research and Development which was being implemented in the 23 countries of West and Central Africa under CORAF. In his role he oversaw effective implementation of the project activities and the management of the project resources among other things.

The new Secretary General boasts of an experience spanning nearly 20 years as a seed systems and business development guru as well as undertaking assignments on private seed sector development. On seed policy development he has a track record of handling variety development and release; quality control and certification, import/export facilitation procedures.

The AFSTA Board, Secretariat and the entire membership welcome Dr Yacouba to the AFSTA family.

New African Cereal and Legume Consortium seeks to elevate innovation in plant breeding

By Aghan Daniel | AFSTA Communication Officer | daghan@afsta.org

A new consortium on cereals and legumes, which aims at fostering partnerships on the crops breeding will focus on collaboration and investment by the private sector, a leading expert has said.

While addressing delegates at the 24th African Seed Trade Association Annual Congress on March 5, in Mombasa, Dr. Solomon Gizaw, Head of the Technologies for African Agricultural Transformation (TAAT) Clearinghouse said that the consortium will enable sharing genetic resources and breeding techniques to superior crop varieties.

A statement from AFSTA Secretary General, Dr Yacouba Diallo, noted that the initiative, African Cereal and Legume Breeding Consortium (ACLBC) will foster partnerships between governmental organisations, research institutions, and private entities to expedite the development of high-yielding, pest-resistant, nutrient-rich and climate-adapted cereal and legume varieties.

“With a focus on collaboration and investment, this consortium seeks to enhance farm-level productivity and contribute to economic growth by leveraging the strengths of both the public and private sectors,” said Yacouba.

ACLBC has been established by a partnership between the African Seed Trade Association (AFSTA) and the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) through

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Dr. Solomon Gizaw of TAAT takes delegates through what the African Cereal and Legume Breeding Consortium intends to do.

the Technologies for African Agricultural Transformation (TAAT) Programme, as an integral part of the AfDB Feed Africa Strategy the focal emphasis of such a consortium is multifaceted.

Primarily, it enables sharing genetic resources and breeding techniques to superior crop varieties. Private sector participants invest in crop breeding research, seed multiplication and distribution channels, which facilitate farmer access to seeds of improved crop varieties by farmers more rapidly than the public programmes alone could achieve.

The consortium also serves as an incubator for innovation in plant breeding technologies, harnessing cutting-edge techniques like molecular breeding. Moreover, it creates commercial opportunities for

businesses involved in agri-inputs production and marketing with reference to seeds, agrochemicals, farming equipment, and other related services.

Benefits of joining the consortium

In order to join the consortium, private seed companies must be members of AFSTA.

“Non-profit organisations like research institutes and universities can only join ACLBC if International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) invites them; however, they cannot be full members,” added Dr Gizaw.

Every year, he noted, members can ask for seeds of up to three different types of crops, such as Maize, Rice, Wheat, Sorghum, Millet, Soybean, and particular crops, including the High Iron Bean (HIB), as long as those seeds are available and can be moved safely between countries.

“Upon receiving the seeds, members will have the sole rights to use them for two years, but this is based on agreements over intellectual property and testing with the technology providers. The seeds can only be requested after all export and quarantine protocols have been met,” said Dr Gizaw.

Various delegates at the Congress observed that the formation of breeding consortium, represents a contemporary step towards an integrated approach that builds on years of experience in plant breeding, agronomic research and seed system development within Africa.

Study: Farmers still reluctant to embrace new seed varieties

By Sharon Atieno | sharonphoebeatieno@gmail.com

Though improved seed varieties have certain advantages including better nutritional content, resistance to diseases and pests, climate change adaptations, and higher yields, adoption by African farmers remains low.

A 2023 survey conducted by the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Centre (CIMMYT) covering over 4,000 farmers in Kenya from Embu, Kirinyaga, Busia and Vihiga counties found that one of the main challenges hindering adoption is farmers' perceptions.

While speaking at the African Seed Trade Association (AFSTA) 2024 Congress, Will Rodgers, co-founder and Managing Director, Resourced, mentioned that the survey found that over 2,000 farmers perceived the new varieties to be more expensive than the old ones, while about half (48%) thought that they were more susceptible to pests and diseases.

Resourced is a seed sector strategy and consultant which runs various projects in Africa to support uptake of the certified seed. The research was carried out under the Seed Marketing Innovations for Africa (SMIA).

The project aims to accelerate seed sales and turnover for crops like maize, common beans and other vegetatively propagated crops (VPC) in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania up to 2026.

The SMIA Program brings together an experienced group of agro-input market research professionals (AgNexus), CGIAR seed systems researchers (CIMMYT), and seed sector strategy and operations

consultants (Resourced) – to test the impact and scaling potential of technical, seed marketing innovation. CIMMYT is the implementing partner for two marketing areas namely Varietal Information and Point of Sale (POS).

According to Rodgers, they also found out that around half of the farmers perceived new varieties to have quality issues and with inconsistent or minimal yield advantages.

As such, the CIMMYT report calls for the need to improve communicating value proposition, and improved agronomic practices for farmers to recognize the full potential of improved seeds.

Several studies conducted across the continent have shown that adoption of improved seed varieties by farmers will go a long way in improving yields and food security.

Currently, Africa imports up to USD 35 billion worth of food which is estimated to increase to USD 100 billion by 2030.

A 2019 study conducted by the Kenyan-based Seeds Systems Group (SSG) in 2019 found that if a fraction of farmers adopted improved seeds, Africa's agricultural sector could increase food production by 25 million metric tons.

The SSG report found that this could be achieved even if one in three farmers in just 15 of the continent's 54 countries are able to obtain improved seed.

Photo Credit | AFSTA



Will Rodgers, co-founder and Managing Director, Resourced, mentioned that the survey found that over 2,000 farmers perceived the new varieties to be more expensive than the old ones.

Programs under Resourced focus on building well-functioning formal systems. One of them is IMAGE which deals with monitoring variety adoption through genotyping. The program seeks to provide evidence for seed varietal adoption and commercialisation of maize, common beans, teff cassava, rice and cowpea in Nigeria, Ethiopia and Tanzania.

The second program is the Rich Crops Action Lab (RCAL) which seeks to deliver resilient crops for reliable nutrition in Ethiopia, Morocco and Nigeria through crops like barley, wheat, oats and other opportunity crops.

The other is Seed Marketing Innovations for Africa (SMIA) which seeks to accelerate seed sales and turnover for crops like maize, common beans and other vegetatively propagated crops (VPC) in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania.



Nigeria has approved the commercial release of transgenic insect-resistant and drought-tolerant maize varieties, known as TELA maize.

Nigeria approves commercial release of GM maize varieties

By Alex Abutu

The Federal Government of Nigeria has approved the commercial release of transgenic insect-resistant and drought-tolerant maize varieties, known as TELA maize.

The approval was granted by the National Committee on Naming, Registration and Release of Crop Varieties, Livestock Breeds/Fisheries (NCNRRCVLF), headed by Prof Olusoji Olufajo at its 33rd meeting at the National Centre for Genetic Resources and Biotechnology (NACGRAB), Ibadan on January 11, 2024.

The four varieties approved by the NVRC are SAMMAZ 72T, SAMMAZ 73T, SAMMAZ 74T, and SAMMAZ 75T.

The new maize varieties are drought tolerant and are resistant to stem-borer and fall armyworms, resulting in a yield advantage of up to 10 tons per hectare under good agronomic practices. The national average for similar hybrids is six tons per hectare.

'Very proud of our scientists'

Stem borers reduce maize production in several countries in Africa. At the same time, fall armyworms can destroy up to 20 million metric tons of maize in Africa each year, enough to feed 100 million people.

The release and registration of the four varieties followed environmental release approval in October 2021, granted by the National Biosafety Management Agency (NBMA).

Development of the improved varieties was led by the Institute for Agricultural Research (IAR) Samaru, Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, through the TELA Maize Public-Private Partnership coordinated by AATE. The TELA Maize Project is being implemented in Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, and South Africa.

Prof Ado Yusuf, Executive Director of IAR, expressed satisfaction with releasing the four new maize varieties, saying, "IAR is very proud of our scientists who are addressing the maize productivity challenges in the country and beyond. These varieties have undergone thorough research and developed using biotechnology tools over several years of continuous testing and revalidation."

Dr Canisius Kanangire, AATF's Executive Director, said: "The release of TELA Maize in Nigeria will contribute to food and nutrition security in line with the Federal Government's Agricultural Transformation agenda. AATF reaffirms unwavering commitment to addressing challenges farmers face across the continent."

Reduce the use of pesticides

Professor Garba Sharubutu, the Executive Secretary of the Agricultural Research Council of Nigeria (ARCN), said the approval of the TELA Maize variety in Nigeria is a critical milestone that confirms the potential of biotechnology in ensuring food and nutrition security and improved livelihood of farming households in Africa.

Prof Mustapha Abdullahi, Director-General of the National Biotechnology Development Agency (NABDA), celebrated the release, saying that, with the

advent of TELA Maize, farmers will reduce the use of pesticides on maize to the bare minimum, which is beneficial to humans, livestock, and the environment.

Dr Sylvester Oikeh, the TELA Maize Project Manager, celebrated Nigeria's decision by calling other African countries to act for farmers. "I am encouraged by this decision by the Federal Government of Nigeria that reflects their commitment to the needs of farmers. I congratulate the scientists for their hard work and dedication that has seen the product getting closer to farmers. I look forward to other countries making similar decisions for the farmers' good," Dr Oikeh said.

The other partners in the TELA Maize project are national agricultural research institutes in Kenya, Mozambique, Ethiopia, and South Africa; the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT) and Bayer, with funding from Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

Meanwhile, on February 21, Rwanda enacted legislation governing biosafety, aimed at ensuring the safe handling, transfer, and use of GMOs within the country.

The law's primary objective is to establish a robust level of protection concerning the safe transfer and utilization of living modified organisms (LMOs), commonly known as GMOs, generated through modern biotechnology. This measure considers the potential adverse impacts on biological diversity and human health resulting from such transfer and utilization reports Emmanuel Ntirenganya published in the .

Alex Abutu works at African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF), leading communication and advocacy strategies in West and Central Africa.

Story link: <https://allianceforscience.org/blog/2024/01/nigeria-approves-commercial-release-of-gm-maize-varieties/>



NARO signs agreement, grants licenses to 10 seed companies in push to tame fake seeds in uganda

Photo Credit | Aghan Daniel



Three top institutes in Nigeria in conjunction with the African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF) have developed a maize variety which would boost farmers yield by 43 per cent.

By Saxone Akhaine, Kaduna

The National Agricultural Research Organization (NARO) has signed cooperation agreements with 10 seed companies to eliminate the supply of fake seeds on the Ugandan market.

The agreements were signed at the organization offices in Entebbe, bringing the total number of licensed seed companies to twenty-three (23).

According to NARO, the signing of the agreements was a step in ensuring farmers get the right and genuine seeds, a development that would contribute to improved food production not only for the country's food security but also for export.

In addition, NARO expects that the companies will multiply and disseminate authentic and certified seed varieties developed by the organization.

Addressing directors of seed companies, Dr. Yona Baguma, the Director General of NARO tasked them to invest in good infrastructures and skilled people who understand the dynamics of seed varieties.

“Set up reasonable infrastructures that help to invest in quality seeds. This would enable professionals to invest in better seed varieties. You should also invest in the value chain to ensure multiplication of quality seed varieties, he stated.

Dr. Baguma implored seed companies to ensure adequate supply of quality seeds to farmers, adding that NARO is committed to investing in vibrant seed varieties that are competitive globally. He however cautioned unlicensed seed companies that they risk legal action.

“Ensure timely supply of adequate quantity of good seed varieties to farmers. As NARO, we believe in availing the right information to the general public.”

He also assured them that the organization would deal with seed companies involved in the supply of fake seeds, and those with no contract with NARO.

Baguma said that it will be the duty of the seed companies to ensure fake inputs do not make it to the market with the companies' logo or else it will be the companies to explain the malpractice.

“It is you to ensure that a seed supplied in your name and logo is of good quality. Where you fail, you owe us a duty of explanation,” Baguma said.

He urged the companies to invest in technologies and infrastructure that improve their work and also invest in the development of human resources for the job. He also called for compliance with industry guidelines set up by the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries.

Baguma disclosed that several new improved varieties were awaiting certification and advertising before the seed companies could apply for them

He asked the companies to exploit the East African Community common market to broaden their market and also earn the country foreign exchange by expanding the export base.

Dr. Sadiq Kassim, the Deputy Director General in charge of Agriculture Technology Promotion at NARO asked the Ministry of Agriculture officials to scale up inspections to ensure supply of quality seeds to farmers.

After realising their sales, seed companies are required to pay loyalty to facilitate research processes, further bulking of early generating seeds, development of seed varieties and sustainable supply of quality seeds.

Some of the new seed companies on board include Variety Seed Company, Century Seed Company and Equator Seed Company among others.

Story link: <https://www.foodsafetyafrica.net/naro-signs-agreement-grants-licenses-to-10-seed-companies-in-push-to-tame-fake-seeds-in-uganda/>



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AFSTA Secretariat offers online 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 of the homepage and will flash alternately as it currently on our 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\$ 300 for AFSTA members and US\$350 for Non members for a period of one year.

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