

Where Nature and Science Meet

biolines@mweb.co.za

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Editors: Dr Dave Keetch & Remi Akanbi

**Biotechnology Stakeholders
Association**

Tel: 012 667 2689

Fax: 012 667 1920

www.africabio.com

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GM TRADE ISSUES AND DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

<http://www.ifpri.org/divs/eptd/dp/eptdp147.asp>.

There is a large heterogeneity in current import approval and marketing policies of genetically modified (GM) food worldwide. Developing countries tend to develop regulations based on their own objectives and on their international obligations. Despite harmonized safety approval regulations, there is no agreement on labeling and marketing regulations for GM food. These are conclusions from "An analysis of trade related international regulations of genetically modified food and their effects on developing countries" published by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI).

Guillaume P. Gruère, author of the discussion paper, proposes "policy arrangements to enable developing countries to simultaneously satisfy production, consumption, international trade and risk management objectives." He suggests two critical measures:

- the practical and efficient use of harmonized safety standards for imports, and
- the setting up of segregation strategies of GM versus non-GM for sensitive export commodities.

ETHIOPIAN BILLS FOR PLANT BREEDER'S RIGHTS AND BIODIVERSITY

<http://www.ena.gov.et/default.asp?CatId=6&NewsId=191992>

The House of Peoples' Representatives of Ethiopia recently endorsed two bills: the Plant Breeders' Right and the Genetic Resources and Community Knowledge and Rights. The Plant Breeders' Right bill aims to enable the private sector to release new plant varieties suitable for the local ecosystems

and environmental conditions of the country, and will encourage private investment and facilitate the utilization of crop varieties developed abroad. The bill was presented by the Rural Development and the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Standing committees of the House.

The Bill Providing for Genetic Resources and Community Knowledge and Rights is set to provide protection of Ethiopia's genetic resources, as well to facilitate the expansion of investment and the equitable share of the benefits of utilizing local genetic resources.

The bill was presented by the Rural Development, Legal, Information and Cultural Affairs Standing Committees. Member of the Committee indicated that community knowledge and recognition given for community resources would have immense contribution for the protection and preservation the genetic resources of the country.

AGRI BIOTECH NETWORK IN AFRICA LAUNCHED

<http://www.abneta.org>.

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the African Biotechnology Stakeholders Forum (ABSF) launched an agricultural biotechnology network for professionals and other stakeholders in Africa. Agricultural Biotechnology Network in Africa (ABNETA) aims to build a knowledge base in plant breeding and biotechnology to facilitate access to reliable information on new technologies to improve agricultural production and reduce hunger.

While launching the network at the Africa Biotechnology Stakeholder's Forum (ABSF) secretariat in Nairobi, Agriculture Minister Kipruto Kirwa of Kenya said ABNETA would provide crucial data needed to inform decision making on matters of self-sufficiency in food production in the continent. The Network provides a common platform and tools to share, learn, discuss and decide agricultural matters on the continent.

ABSF will manage and implement ABNETA through national coordinators who will collect and collate breeding and biotechnology information from both government and private sectors. It will organize meetings, workshops and seminars to enhance the goals of the network.

FRAMEWORK FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

Chikakula Miti at: CMiti@comesa.int

African Heads of State and Governments have endorsed the Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP), a framework which sets the focus and priorities for sustainable agricultural development in the Eastern and Central African (ECA) Region. CAADP will be largely implemented by the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), in collaboration with other regional economic organizations, research institutes, and international organizations. CAADP is supported by African and international donors, including USAID, the World Bank and DFID. USAID has programmed approximately US\$ 200 million per year for the next five years to CAADP. The initiative is currently active in six countries: Ghana, Kenya, Mali, Mozambique, Uganda and Zambia.

The objectives of CAADP are to: extend the area under sustainable land management and reliable water control systems; improve the productivity of agriculture with particular attention to small-scale farmers, especially women; enhance rural infrastructure and trade related capacities for market access; increase food supply, reduce hunger and improve responses to food emergency crises; and advance agricultural research, technology dissemination and adoption.

COMESA recently held a series of meetings with donors and collaborating partners to discuss CAADP priorities, outline some of the collaborative mechanisms that will be used in the field implementation of key CAADP activities, and agree on a schedule of implementation of key events.

FINAL DRAFT FOR MALAWI BIOTECH POLICY

<http://www.nationmalawi.com/articles.asp?articleID=15802>

Top government officials from the Ministries of Science and Industry, Agriculture, Trade and Private Sector Development and Environmental Affairs are set to meet in Lilongwe to discuss the final draft

of Malawi's Biotechnology Policy. The regulatory framework will cover crosscutting issues such as science, agriculture, trade, safety, environment and human health.

Alick Manda, Chief Scientist at the National Research Council of Malawi, was quoted by Nation Malawi as saying that the draft will eventually be subjected to a national stakeholders' meeting later in April. The draft is expected to either amend or change the 2002 Biosafety Act.

AGRICULTURAL SOIL DECLINING IN AFRICA

http://www.rockfound.org/Library/Summit_Press_Release.pdf.

A recent report by the International Center for Soil Fertility and Agricultural Development (IFDC) shows that 75% of farmland in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is plagued by severe degradation, and is losing basic soil nutrients needed to grow the crops that feed Africa. The highest rates of nutrient depletion were found in Guinea, Congo, Angola, Rwanda, Burundi, and Uganda, where nutrient losses are more than 60 kilograms per hectare per year. Africa's crisis in food production and battle with hunger are largely rooted in this "soil health crisis."

The report also found that:

- About 50,000 hectares of forest and 60,000 hectares of Africa's grasslands are lost to agriculture yearly, due to low levels of soil fertility and increasing population pressures;
- Loss of nitrogen and phosphorus through soil erosion by wind and water, and leaching of nitrogen and potassium contribute to soil nutrient depletion; and
- About 33% of the sub-Saharan population is undernourished, and most of the undernourished live in East Africa, where nutrient mining rates are high.

To address this issue, President Olusegun Obasanjo, Chairman of the Implementing Committee of the African Union's New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), and President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, is calling on African heads of state, ministers, donors, industry leaders, farmers' organizations, and others to support the transformation of African agriculture, beginning with the "Africa Fertilizer Summit." The summit will tackle the soil health crisis and adopt strategies to revitalize African agriculture, and will take place on the 9th-13th of June, 2006, in Abuja, Nigeria.

BOTSWANA AGRICULTURE MINISTER CALLS FOR PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN GM ISSUES

<http://allafrica.com/stories/200604050700.html>

Involvement of the public in decision-making processes on Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO) is critical. This was stated by Peter Siele, Botswana's Assistant Minister of Agriculture, who spoke at a consultative workshop for the country's National Biosafety Framework.

The framework is a combination of policy, legal, administrative, and technical instruments that seeks to promote the development and application of biotechnology. It also aims to address environmental and health safety issues while minimizing any adverse socio-economic impacts. Nancy Kgengwenyane, workshop facilitator, stressed that a precautionary principle is still in place, which calls for farmers not to plant GM crops if they are uncertain of its effects. She, however, cautioned that biotechnology is an expensive process, hence the need for the public to have strong political will.

MALAWI ADVISED TO DIVERSIFY DIET FOR FOOD SECURITY

Food insecurity in Malawi can be overcome if people's high dependency on maize is reduced, according to a World Food Program (WFP) study. Malawi recently suffered one of the country's worst maize shortages; the aim of the study was to explore alternative sources of food by conducting a nine-month survey of 4,000 people in four districts around the country, to monitor the aftermath of the shortage.

The results of the survey have prompted the WFP to suggest two approaches to improving the state of Malawi's food security. These were to:

- encourage communities, schools, health centers, and households to grow alternative crops, such as indigenous varieties of potatoes, which could provide an alternative source of carbohydrates; and

- educate community members, students, and patients about nutrition and preparing alternative foods to improve diets. These diets, authors recommended, should include other food groups like fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts, oil, and fats.

The findings have also been released as "Low-Input Food and Nutrition Security: Growing and Eating More Using Less," a manual which has become part of the WFP's diet diversification program to be implemented in all Malawi schools.

NOTICE BOARD

7 – 9 June 2006 – Biotech Conference in India - Bangalore Bio 2006 will take place in Bangalore India. The international conference will address key issues on biotech landscape, current trends in innovation, scientific discoveries in biotechnology, sustenance, Governance Issues and the future of the Indian biotechnology industry in the global arena. Keeping in view the potential of biotech application in Indian agriculture, the Bangalore Bio 2006 will give special thrust to agri-biotechnology, highlighting current challenges and future opportunities. Topics for discussion include: transgenic crops and agri-biotechnology; functional foods and plant pharmaceuticals; biofuels; biofertilizers and biopesticides; and IPR, safety and regulatory issues. For more information visit: <http://www.bangalorebio>

13-15 June 2006 - International Symposium on Molecular Farming in Plants will be held at the Boulevard Hotel, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The symposium aims to promote the vital exchange of knowledge, ideas, and information on the newest developments and applied technologies in field of the molecular farming. Representatives from universities, research institutes, and industry worldwide are invited to attend. For more information, contact the Center for Research in Biotechnology for Agriculture (CEBAR) at cebar@um.edu.my and cebar@yahoo.com, or visit their website at <http://www.cebar.um.edu.my>.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR POSTGRADUATE STUDY

Nine Funded PhDs available in Denmark, the Netherlands & the UK in animal breeding genetics and genomics - SABRETRAIN is a high quality European training network with 9 PhD studentships in genetics & genomics for sustainable animal breeding now available, 3 in each of Denmark (Danish Institute of Agricultural Sciences), the Netherlands (ID-Lelystad, Wageningen University) & the UK (Roslin Institute and Scottish Agricultural College). Students will complete most of their PhD research at 1 partner, but also benefit from being able to move to conduct research as a placement in another country. Studentships are generously funded, with living allowances plus mobility, travel & career exploratory allowances. All studentships are available from September 2006. Applicants from all countries are welcome but must normally be nationals of a State other than that of the host and move country when taking up their appointment, and must also be in the first 4 years of their research activity.

For further details of individual PhD projects & eligibility criteria, please visit <http://www.genesis-faraday.org> which displays the contact details of main supervisors also so they can be contacted directly. All participating institutions are equal opportunity employers. The SABRETRAIN project is funded by the EU Marie Curie Early Stage Training Programme. Applications including a full CV & the names & addresses (including email) of two academic referees should be sent by email to the supervisor of each project by May 19th 2006.