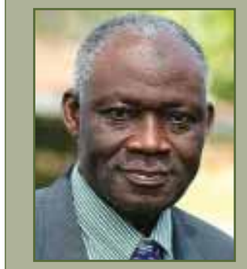
Ghana enact Biosafety Law



The Biosafety Act has received Presidential Assent, thus becoming a complete law. The Law, from the Biosafety Act, 831, 2011 will enable Ghana to allow the application of biotechnology in food crop production involving Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) to enter food production. It will also ensure an adequate level of production in the field of safe development transfer, handling and use of GMOs that are pharmaceuticals for human use, and which are the subject of any other enactment.

It will also establish a transparent and predictable process to review and make decisions on specified GMOs that are pharmaceutical for human use. Speaking to the Ghana News Agency (GNA) in an interview, Mr Ebenezer Adjietror, Principal Assistant Clark in Charge of Table Office, Parliament House said the Act went through all the required stages before coming into effect as a law.

The 28-page Act has nine Arrangements of Sections, which include Scope, Objectives and Establishment, Administration, Handling of Requests for Approvals, Reviews and Approvals, Technical Advisory Committee, Regulatory Agencies, Inspections, Finance and Miscellaneous. It also has five schedules which include -Conduct of Business and Affairs of the Board, Information Required in Applications for Contained or Confined Use, Information Required in Applications for Release, Importation and Placing on the Market, Risk Assessment and Regulatory Agencies.

Under the new Biosafety law, a National Biosafety Authority will have to be established with the functions clearly spelt out in the Act and the makeup of the governing body. In West Africa, neighboring Burkina Faso is currently using biotechnology for farming particularly in Cotton and vegetable production while Togo, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Mali and South Africa are also applying the technology.

Ghana, before the passage of the law was using an existing Legislative Instrument; CSIR Act 521 of 1996 as a template, since it has provisions for the conduct of research in general, and it is simply to extend this to the conduct of research on Genetically Modified Organisms. Professor Walter Sandow Alhassan, Project Coordinator on Strengthening Capacity for Safe Biotechnology Management in Sub-Sahara Africa (SABIMA) of the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) told the GNA that the enactment of the Biosafety law is the culmination of years of outreach activities and advocacy for biotechnology and Biosafety involving a cross-section of Ghanaians including the scientific community, media, farmer-based organizations, consumer associations, religious bodies and legislators supported by donor agents or their representatives.

Prof. Alhassan, a former Director-General of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research said the passage of the law marks the determination of the government and people of Ghana to meet the legal requirement for the safe application of modern biotechnology for socio-economic development especially through agriculture. Out of the 25 countries planting biotech crops, 15 are developing countries and 10 are industrialized countries. Another 30 countries approve import of biotech products for food and feed use.

AfricaBio

INVITATION

"SA BIOTECH AND MEDIA DIALOGUE"

Date: 16th May 2012

Venue: Constantia Hotel, Midrand

Time: 09:00 for 09:30

RSVP: By 2nd May 2012

Tel: +27 12 844 0127

RSVP to: Penelope@africabio.com

Cost: No charge

For inquiries, please contact

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AfricaBio is an independent, non-profit biotechnology stakeholders association that provides accurate information and creates awareness, understanding as well as knowledge on biotechnology and biosafety in South Africa and the African region.

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AfricaBio addresses parliamentary portfolio on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

From left Mr Lulu Johnson, chairperson of the committee; Prof Klaus Ammann, emeritus Prof, University of Bern, Switzerland, guest speaker; Corey Pickelsimer, senior agricultural attaché, USDA, USA Embassy, Pretoria, WEMA speaker; Dr Kingstone Mashingaidze, ARC, speaker; Dr Nompumelelo Obokoh, CEO, AfricaBio, and Mr. Salam Abram MP.

On 6 March 2012, the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Agriculture and Fisheries heard in depth presentations on the benefits of genetically modified crops and how this technology can benefit small scale farmers. The chairperson of the portfolio committee, Mr Lulu Johnson MP (ANC) also invited members of the portfolio committees of science and technology, environmental affairs and land and environmental affairs.

More than 40 members of these portfolio committees, representing all political parties in parliament, attended the presentations. Dr Shadrack Moephuli, CEO of the Agricultural Research Council and Dr Julian Jafta, Director, Genetic Resources, Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries also attended the presentations. The presenters were: Prof Klaus Ammann, emeritus professor of the University of Bern, Switzerland, a world renowned independent Swiss biotech scientist and a member of the Swiss Biosafety Committee, in his presentation highlighted the benefit of using biotechnology to fight hunger and poverty in Africa.

Dr Nompumelelo Obokoh, CEO of AfricaBio gave a presentation on Harnessing the benefits of agri biotechnology in SA: The Bt maize case study.

Other presentations includes a presentation from Dr Kingston Mashingaidze on the Water efficient maize for Africa project as well as Mr Corey Pickelsimer, senior agricultural attaché, USDA, United States Embassy, Pretoria on the Overview of agricultural biotechnologies in the USA.

GM CROPS BENEFIT SMALLHOLDER FARMERS

AfricaBio guests at the events.

Genetically modified crops have the potential to change the crop production landscape for smallholder farmers in developing countries and increase yields, says Professor Klaus Ammann, emeritus professor, University of Bern, Switzerland.

Prof Ammann, world renowned agricultural biotechnology scientist, was the keynote speaker at an AfricaBio biotechnology smallholder farmers' information day at Fun Valley, Olifantsvlei, near Soweto. The event was sponsored by the Gauteng Provincial Department of Agriculture and rural development and United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) more than 60 smallholder farmers attended.

He said this had been proven in countries such as India, with successful Bt cotton plantings with an adoption rate of 95%, where seven million smallholder farmers planted 10.6 million ha of Bt cotton in 2011. The average farm size was 1.5 ha. India enhanced farm income from Bt cotton in 2010 by US$ 2.5 billion to boost economic returns and the livelihood of farmers.

Ammann added that biotechnology offered great potential to accelerate the development and introduction of improved crop varieties such as vegetables and fruit. To address the yield gaps, agricultural biotechnology approaches must be part of an integrated broader thrust involving public and private investment for the development of the technology. A commitment to increased and sustained funding for agricultural R&D is required, said Ammann.

He dispelled the myths raised by anti-GMO activists that GM crops posed health risks to humans or animals or a threat to the environment. "There is no scientifically proven data to support these myths. There is little or no difference in composition between GM and non-GM crops - except for the trait that has been nutritionally enhanced" Prof Ammann emphasized.

The role of the Gauteng Provincial Department of Agriculture and rural development was highlighted in a presentation by Mr. Charles Mayanga. The department has committed to exploring the use of biotech for food production and job creation through their Biotech strategy.

Mr Corey Pickelsimer, senior agricultural attaché, USDA, USA Embassy, Pretoria, co-sponsors of the farmers' day, said the USDA supported the safe and appropriate use of science and technology, including biotechnology, to help meet agricultural challenges and consumer needs of the 21st century. The USDA played a key role in ensuring that products produced using biotechnology were safe to be grown and used in the United States. Once these products entered commerce, USDA supported bringing these and other products to the global marketplace.

GM plants that were designed to benefit production systems for the major crops in the US have been rapidly adopted by American farmers. For 2011 GM soybeans, cotton and maize had respective adoption rates of 94%, 90% and 88%. Examples of GM crops under development for potential use in the developing world included virus-resistant cassava, insect-resistant cowpea and drought-tolerant maize.

Mr Motlatsi Musi, smallholder farmer on whose farm the farmers' day was held, gave the farmers the opportunity to inspect his GM maize crop planted with Monsanto's DKC 78-15 Bt maize, resistant to the stalk borer.

Musi explained that he had been planting Bt maize since 2004 and that his yield increased by 34% over conventional maize because the stalk borer was controlled almost 100%.

As a result of his extra profits, he had purchased a mechanical harvester and had increased his plantings from seven ha in 2005 to 25 ha in 2007.

"The maize is consumed by me and my family and my neighbors in Soweto to whom I sell my crop. We have not suffered any ill health. As a result of our increased yields, three of us smallholder farmers from Soweto voluntarily donated ten bags of white GM mealie-meal to an old-age home in Soweto and the Soweto Hospice on World Food Day in 2009. The recipients consumed the mealie-meal without any ill effects.

BUHLE FARMERS OUTREACH

Cross section of students at the training.

AfricaBio presented a one day Introduction to Biotechnology course to students at the Buhle Farmer's Academy in Delmas, Mpumalanga on 14 March 2012. This course introduces students to the fundamental scientific principles of biotechnology by focusing on the most important aspects of first, second and more emphasis on the third generation biotechnology.

South African Adoption of Biotech/GM Crops

Global status of Commercialized Biotech/GM crops: 2011

The hectarage occupied by biotech crops in South Africa in 2011 continued to increase for the 14th consecutive season.

The estimated total biotech maize crop area in 2011 was 2.3 million hectares, compared 2.2 million hectares in 2010/2011. The total maize area increased by 5%, mainly due a successful export drive that depleted carry-over of grain stocks.

The total area of soybeans increased from 390,000 hectares in 2010 to an estimated 450.000 hectares in 2011, due to higher demand, while the adoption rate of herbicide tolerant soybeans remained at 85% (382,000 hectares).

Total cotton area is expected to remain at 15,000 hectares, due to competition from maize and soybeans, and its biotech adaption rate remained at 10%, of which 95% were stacked traits; herbicide tolerant cotton is used as a mandatory refuge for biotech cotton fields.

Various biotech traits are being field tested for maize and cotton, and new biotech crops.

Adoption of Biotech Crops in South Africa, 2001 to 2011 (Thousand Hectares).

Year	Total Area of			
	Biotech crops*	Biotech Maize	Biotech White Maize	% of Total White Maize
2001	197	166	6	<1
2002	273	236	60	3
2003	404	341	144	8
2004	573	410	147	8
2005	610	456	281	29
2006	1,412	1,232	704	44
2007	1,800	1,607	1,040	62
2008	1,813	1,617	891	56
2009	2,116	1,878	1,212	79
2010	2,229	1,898	1,139	75
2011	2,270	1,873	1,126	72
Total	**13,697**	**11,714**	**6,750**	

Source: ISAAA 2011
*Composed of maize, soybean and cotton