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AFSTA CONGRESS 2005 in brief

*By Justin Rakotoarisaona
AFSTA Secretary General*

The African Seed Trade Association (AFSTA) annual congress 2005 held from 16th to 18th March 2005 in Yaoundé, Cameroon attracted 97 delegates from 35 countries, among others, the regional and international seed organizations. It was an excellent opportunity for the participants to discuss and exchange information and views amongst themselves. The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development of Cameroon graced the opening ceremony. All the technical sessions on important topics such as Vegetable seed trade in Africa, Intellectual Property Rights, Material Transfer Agreement, Accreditation, Arbitration rules, Biosafety regulations and stewardship, and Coexistence of GM and non-GM seeds were well attended. The congress was preceded by a half-day workshop on plant variety protection facilitated by UPOV (Union for the Protection of New Plant variety) and another half-day workshop on cotton seed facilitated by Syngenta Agro.

The AFSTA General Assembly held on 18th March 2005 adopted a position paper on Intellectual Property Rights (IPR). More position papers will be

drafted, among others, on Material Transfer Agreement and on Coexistence of GM and non-GM seeds. A new strategy to face the challenges of the African seed industry was also adopted. Objectives for AFSTA remain to be the organization of technical training related to seeds to build capacity of its members in 2005/2006, among others, one training session on Material Transfer Agreement (MTA) and Coexistence of GM and non-GM seeds scheduled for 17th and 18th October 2005 in Nairobi, Kenya. AFSTA will continue to actively support the seed legislation harmonization process in the sub-regions.

It was confirmed that AFSTA annual congress 2006 will be held at the Imperial Resort Beach Hotel in Entebbe, Uganda from 28th to 31st March 2006. The National Organizing Committee for AFSTA Congress 2006, headed by Ms Josephine Okot, has been working hard to ensure that it will meet your expectations in every aspect.

**REINFORCEMENT OF THE SEED
TRADE IN UGANDA**

*By Josephine OKOT, MD of Victoria Seeds –
Uganda*

Uganda has been aspiring to join the OECD seed scheme and obtain accreditation to ISTA. The absence of any international seed certification

scheme in Uganda has remained a sticking issue and a major constraint to seed market development because seed companies cannot export seeds to neighboring Kenya, which is an OECD member country.

The Uganda Seed Trade Association (USTA) recognizes that the removal of such constraints will help the private seed sector in Uganda realize its full potential and improve access by farmers to quality seed. USTA held a strategic planning workshop on 13th – 14th February 2004 to develop strategies for addressing constraints to seed market developments. At the workshop, a clear, enabling and empowering guiding mission/vision for USTA was adopted within the current challenges to assist members achieve objectives as well as the implementation plan. Strategic profile statements defined the mechanism through which such challenges are to be addressed namely:

- Retain as members of USTA all companies and groups engaged in seed development, production and trade.
- Establish and enforce a code of conduct to ensure ethical business practices by all members and affiliates.
- Establish strong working relationship with key government officials and agricultural sector representatives for effective advocacy.
- Lobby for policies and laws to sustain the development of a private seed industry in Uganda, as well as expand funding sources to ensure financial sustainability.
- Add value to the seed industry by establishing a trade database.
- Develop the capacities of members through the development and implementation of training programs especially in the areas of seed certification, trade association

management and resource development.

- Develop seed production and quality assurance manuals for its members to ensure and maintain quality seeds on the market.

The positive outcome from such a drive was that an OECD evaluation team visited Uganda from 10 to 18th July 2004 to assess the country's capacity to join the seed scheme. This visit resulted in the recommendation of Uganda to be admitted in OECD seed scheme in 2005/2006. This is a big step forward to enable Uganda to export its seeds to international markets.

INFORMATION ON ISTA AND OECD

*By Dr. Wynand van der Walt,
Life time member of AFSTA*

ISTA

ISTA, International Seed Testing Association, is a non-governmental representative association for seed testing laboratories, and serves to establish global harmonized seed testing standards. These standards are contained in the ISTA handbooks. The association makes use of international expertise of some 250 scientists and seed technicians on its 17 technical committees. Information can be accessed on its website www.seedtest.org and communications can be directed to Dr Michael Muschick, Secretary-General, at its offices in Switzerland at ista.office@ista.ch.

Traditionally, ISTA members have been official government seed testing stations, but since 1999 experiments have been carried out with a wide range of company seed laboratories to investigate their level of expertise. This project was concluded in July 2004 and the finding was the company seed testing is as good as that of government laboratories. Following an amendment to the ISTA Constitution, all seed testing

laboratories can now apply for accreditation to ISTA and, if they fulfill all requirements of the Quality Assurance Programme, they will be entitled to issue ISTA international seed lot certificates.

Organic farm systems require that only organically produced seeds be used. It also requires that no GM seed be contained in the seed lot. ISTA is now monitoring organic seed testing to ensure that such seed meets the same requirements for germination, purity, seed health as other seeds, as well as complying with zero presence of GM seed. Ring testing experiments to detect GM seed in seed lots have progressed to the stage where false positive and negative readings have been reduced to low levels. The three cycles of GM testing in maize will now move to soybeans in the fourth cycle.

Publications available from the Online ISTA Bookstore can be accessed on <http://www.seedtest.org/en/home.html> and these include the International Rules for Seed Testing – Edition 2005, ISTA Handbook on Seed Sampling, and Approved working Program of the ISTA Technical Committees 2004 – 2007. Interested parties can also subscribe to the free Seed Science and Technology Newsletter or can download abstracts from <http://www.seedtest.org/en/content--1-1157.html>

Two workshops have been planned for 2005: ISTA Seed Moisture Workshop and ISTA Tetrazolium Workshop on Tree and Shrub Seed.

OECD

The Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety arose from the Convention on Biodiversity and the protocol deals specifically with transboundary movement of live modified organisms resulting from certain techniques of modern biotechnology that may have

adverse effects on the environment and on human health. A specific focus is on those organisms that are intended for release into the environment and this brings direct implications for seed moving in the international trade. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Seed Schemes office has proposed that participating countries in its seed certification schemes can play a part in providing seed certificates and labels relevant for compliance to the protocol. The 2004 annual meeting discussed draft documents for potential use by countries on a voluntary basis. The meeting resolved to have the advisory group consider various comments tabled by representatives. At the time of the meeting most of the 52 seed schemes participating countries plus the EU block had acceded to both the CBD and the Protocol. African states included were Egypt, Kenya, South Africa, and Tunisia, with Morocco and Zimbabwe still in the process of acceding to the Protocol.

Several countries reported on progress with the OECD experiment on accreditation on seed sampling and testing on five species groups. South Africa had five companies participating in cotton, ryegrass, sunflower, maize and soybeans. After re-testing some samples, the samples deviating were reduced to 1.7 %.

The OECD meeting recommended the admission of Uganda subject to their rectifying deficient points, submission of a list of varieties eligible for certification, and progress reports at the 2005 and 2006 meetings.

ACSDA AND THE EMERGING PRIVATE SEED SECTOR IN CONGO

By Roger Babady, Chairman of ACSDA

The Congolese Seed Association (ACSDA) is a young association created on March 19, 2002. It will ultimately

regroup all the actors of the seed sector in particular and those of agricultural sector in general in Congo, especially the private sector.

Vision

To exploit the agricultural potential of Congo, with national and international partners to produce quality seedy. Indeed, about hundred thousand hectares of the total surface of Congo (342.000 km²) are arable lands and it possesses the biggest reserve of water in Africa and the second of the world. The population is 2.8 million.

Objectives

- To create a framework of exchange of information and actions for the industry and the seed trade in Congo and in Africa;
- To protect the interests of the seed industry and trade in Congo;
- To Promote and develop the seed industry in order to improve the Congolese and African agricultural production;
- To effectively launch the private seed production in Congo.

In a short run, ACSDA works more actively on improving the business environment so that the private seed industry emerges:

- To make the temporary legislation (3 years) on the tax exemption on seed import to be a permanent legislation;
- To sensitize the actors of the seed sector on the interests of national association in order to increase the number of members for its financial stability;
- To encourage the implantation of seed stores in rural zone to satisfy the needs of the producers;
- To prepare for the participation in AFSTA program in 2005 and all the meetings and anticipated events;

- To help the private seed companies to put in place the basis of the private seed production in Congo.

Achievements

Achievements after its official launching on the 10th September 2004 in Brazzaville, with the support of the African Seed Trade Association (AFSTA) and the American Seed Trade Association (ASTA) include:

- Recognition as representative of the private seed by the development partners (Ministry of agriculture, FAO, UNDP, etc.);
- With the active participation of ACSDA, effective application of the law on the tax exemption on imported seeds in 2005, voted in 2004 for 3 years but not yet applied during 2004.

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The editorial team would like to thank the contributors of this issue.

Disclaimer:

The African Seed Trade Association takes every precaution in verifying the accuracy of information supplied by its Secretariat, but does not accept liability for errors, which may nevertheless appear in this newsletter. Submissions by contributors to the newsletter may not necessarily reflect the views of the AFSTA Secretariat, the Board or its members.

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