

Today is World Soil Day!

Healthy soil: the foundation for healthy people and landscapes

Today we celebrate World Soil Day to highlight the importance of soil as a foundation for healthy people and landscapes.

As global population grows and places demands on agricultural outputs, we need to think carefully about how we use resources, including land. In the context of food security, simply increasing the amount of agricultural land we use is neither desirable nor feasible. What we need is innovation, from the ground up.

Creating healthy soil

Sustainable intensification is critical for producing more food using the same, or less, land in a way that minimizes negative impacts on resources. Sharing scientific knowledge, local best practice and relevant innovation with smallholder farmers can help achieve this.

Supporting healthy people

We can further maximize health benefits by researching new crop varieties that are resilient to drought and submersion, for example. Developing better crops for the future may also mean re-evaluating neglected or underutilized local varieties that can offer potential new sources of improved food, nutritional, culinary and medicinal value for smallholder farmers.



Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations



Managing healthy landscapes

When considering land use, it is important to see the bigger picture, understanding that agricultural production systems interact in many ways and levels of scale, from plot to farm, and from farm to landscape. Challenges arise when trade-offs must be made between different land use objectives, for example, sustainable agriculture and environmental protection.

Working with women and young people will also be important. As global food demand rises, so too do opportunities for young people's careers in agriculture. Education and skills training can help create the next generation of eco- and

nutrition-savvy farmers. Empowering women in rural communities is also essential, helping them build healthy futures through agriculture.

The earth is the foundation upon which we can sustain human health, food security and natural ecosystems. Soil health is an essential component to meeting some of the world's most important challenges.

Excerpt from the blog contributed by Dr Dyno (J.D.H.) Keatinge, AIRCA Chair and Director General of The World Vegetable Centre (AVRDC), Dr Trevor Nicholls, CEO of CABI, and Dr Amit Roy, President and CEO of IFDC

IITA partners with AACE Foods to promote nutrition and agriculture

IITA has recently joined forces with AACE Foods—a micro-business focused on agribusiness which recently launched *Soyamaize*, a blend of premium quality maize and soybean. AACE Foods will work with 800 farmers in Oyo State using IITA's pro-vitamin A maize and aflasafe™ to ensure that good quality and

healthy maize grains are used.

Dr Alfred Dixon, head of IITA's Partnership Coordination Office, who represented Management at the launch, said the initiative was aligned with IITA's efforts in ensuring that the Nigerian population was healthy and strong through the provision of nutritious blends

for children, nursing mothers, and the elderly.

"IITA collaborates with private sector companies because of its interest in growing businesses in Africa," Dr Dixon said. "As a world-class research institute, our research is focused on the biofortification of foods. The successfully released cassava and maize varieties with pro-vitamin A contents are improving nutrition among the local population. aflasafe™ is eliminating aflatoxin from maize, and Nodumax (a soil inoculant) is increasing production of soybean. These are primary components of the product *Soyamaize*."

The launch took place on 2 December at the Conference Center in IITA, Ibadan. The product was officially unveiled by Honorable Dr Muiyiwa Gbadegesin, the Oyo State Commissioner for Health, who was also the keynote speaker.



IITA representatives with Hon. Dr Gbadegesin (third from right) and AACE staff after the unveiling.

Got a story to share? Please email it with photos and captions every Wednesday to Andrea Gros (a.gros@cgiar.org), Katherine Lopez (k.lopez@cgiar.org), Jeffrey T. Oliver (j.oliver@cgiar.org), Catherine Njuguna (c.njuguna@cgiar.org), or Adaobi Umeokoro (a.umeokoro@cgiar.org).

COMESA, IITA/SARD-SC organize multisector workshop to boost cassava industry in Zambia and ESA region

On 27 November, representatives from the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), IITA's Support to Agricultural Research for Development of Strategic Crops in Africa (SARD-SC) project, Zambia's Ministry of Commerce, Trade, and Industry, and Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, as well as NGOs and the cassava private sector in Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique, Uganda, Kenya, and Rwanda congregated in Lusaka for a workshop. The aim was to share knowledge and experiences on how to push forward cassava commercialization in Zambia, particularly in promoting market linkages, processing, and production, and to promote regional trade in the crop.

Mr Thierry Kalonji Mutombo, Director of COMESA's Investment Promotion and Private Sector Development (IPPSD) Department, opened the event. He said that the workshop intended to generate knowledge and experience, promote value addition, and facilitate market linkages between cassava small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and large manufacturing companies that use cassava starch, chips, and flour in their production.

He said, "The COMESA Secretariat, has, in the last 4 years, been working to promote these cassava-based products by supporting the formation of national and regional SME clusters in the cassava sector to build their productive capacities along the value chain and enhance their competitiveness to increase value addition, job creation, and regional and international trade.

In Zambia and in the ESA region, the cassava subsector plays a pivotal role in economic and social development through its contribution to employment creation, food security, wealth, economic growth, and the development of manufacturing industries.



Mr T. Kalonji Mutombo, COMESA IPPSD Director, addressing the workshop participants.

"COMESA thanks IITA/SARD-SC and the Zambian Government for partnering with us in this important workshop. The knowledge and experience generated from this gathering of cassava professionals will lead to the holistic promotion of market linkages, increase production, and ultimately foster the COMESA Regional Integration Agenda through increased SME and farmers' competitiveness, productivity, and participation in national and intra-regional trade."

Mrs Kampamba Pam Mwananshiku, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Trade, and Industry of Zambia, endorsed Mr Mutombo's views, saying, "It is clear that the goal of this event is to conceive ideas to boost intraregional trade, value addition, and job creation in the cassava subsector, hence poverty reduction, based on the actual, on-the-ground knowledge and experiences of the people gathered here. From being a 'poor man's crop', cassava, in recent years has increasingly become an important industrial commodity, with

the ability of being transformed into a myriad of high-value products."

"This meeting-of-minds is important as it tries to put the private sector/SMEs at the center of making the agricultural value chain function more efficiently, to contribute to all stages of the value chain, raise job creation at the farm level, and, above all, contribute to poverty reduction in Zambia.

"Furthermore, this gathering is vital because there is urgent need for the region to search for ways to boost its intra- and interregional exports in agricultural products—particularly cassava—so that foreign exchange earnings will be able to cover the increasing import demands. In this regard, value addition becomes paramount, and this gathering organized by IITA and COMESA falls in line with my Government's programs on promoting value addition. Currently, Zambia's import bill is almost double our export revenue and any initiative to help us curb this unsustainable trend is valuable to the country," she concluded.

In response, Dr David Chikoye, IITA Regional Director for Southern Africa, in his message delivered by Mrs Naomi Kamanga, IITA-Zambia Country Representative, said that the institute would continue to support agricultural initiatives with and by partners such as COMESA and the Zambian Government, and would further engage the private sector, in pursuit of the common mission of reducing poverty and enhancing food security and livelihoods in the region. He also thanked them and the participants for their efforts to share their knowledge and experiences in improving the cassava subsector in Zambia and, consequently, contributing to the improvement of the lives of resource-poor cassava growers in the country.



A cassava farmer and entrepreneur in his cassava processing facility in Mansa, northern Zambia.

IITA Research Fellow wins Best PhD Thesis award

Dr Muhyideen Oyekunle, an IITA Research Fellow and a graduate student of the Department of Agronomy, University of Ibadan, received *The Postgraduate School Award* for the best PhD thesis in the university in the 2012/2013 session with a cash prize of ₦50,000 and a plaque. In addition, Dr Oyekunle received the *Omoworare Lucas Prize Award* for being the best PhD student in the University in 2012/2013 with a cash prize of ₦100,000 and a plaque. The two awards were presented on 17 November during the ceremonies for the 66th Foundation Day Anniversary and the 2014 Convocation at the International Conference Centre, University of Ibadan.

Dr Oyekunle, a former IITA staff, left the Institute after he had defended his thesis and is currently a lecturer in the Department of



The awardee, Dr Muhyideen Oyekunle, in a maize field.

Plant Science, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. He was co-supervised by IITA scientists Drs B. Badu-Apraku and S. Hearne, and M.E. Aken'Ova, Professor of Plant Breeding, on the thesis titled *Genetic analysis and molecular*

characterization of early maturing maize (Zea mays L.) inbred lines for drought tolerance. Dr Oyekunle received the best PhD thesis award from among 614 PhD graduates of the University for the 2011/2012 and 2012/2013 sessions.

BOT member visits IITA, Kinshasa

The staff of IITA Kinshasa hosted Dr Hans Joehr, a member of IITA's Board of Trustees, who visited Kinshasa 23-25 November to learn more about IITA's research activities in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and to initiate strong partnerships between IITA-DRC and the private sector.

Dr Joehr was accompanied by Mr Hervé Barrère, Nestlé's Country Manager. Both were impressed by the presentations of IITA's project coordinators, particularly on the nutritional aspects of IITA's improved crop varieties.

During his closing remarks, Dr Joehr requested Dr Mahungu Nzola Meso, Dr Bokanga Mpoko, and Mr Hervé to design a collaborative model between IITA-DRC and Nestlé based on the supply of quality raw materials, as had been done in other IITA country offices



Dr Hans Joehr, BOT member, at the center and Mr Hervé, Nestlé's Country Manager, with the staff of IITA Kinshasa.

such as Cameroon, Nigeria, and Ghana.

Dr Joehr also expressed his full support for IITA's "Business Incubator Centers" that provide business training to young entrepreneurs seeking to venture

in the agricultural sector. "By shifting gears from Research for Research (R4R) to Research for Development (R4D), youth engagement in agriculture will no longer be by default but by choice," said Dr Joehr.

IITA participates in FARA@15 celebration

As part of the CGIAR contingent, IITA joined the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) in celebrating its 15th year in Birchwood Hotel, Johannesburg, South Africa.

Attended by more than 600 research and development partners, policymakers, investors, private and public sector representatives, and other stakeholders, the FARA@15 event had the theme *Delivering Africa's future through science-led agricultural transformation*.

The Celebrating FARA event was organized to mark the achievements of agricultural research in Africa in the context of FARA's partnership with the national and subregional organizations, and CGIAR—of which IITA is a strong member, launch the Science Agenda for Agriculture in Africa, and reposition FARA for the next decade with a new brand and visual identity.

IITA organized two parallel sessions: *Innovations in outscaling R4D technologies for greater delivery and impact in sub-Saharan Africa*, and *Promoting youths' engagement in agribusiness: the IITA Agripreneur model* as part of a showcase of some of Africa's agricultural science, technologies, and innovations.

The institute also participated in an exhibition under CGIAR in the FARA-CGIAR-led Agricultural Technology Fair. The event also provided IITA staff the opportunity to network and to participate in other sessions that tackled important issues and policy directions influencing Africa's agricultural development and science agenda.



A panel discussion featured the following key speakers (L-R): Dr Ibrahim Assane Mayaki, CEO of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) Planning and Coordinating Agency; HE Tumusiime Rhoda-Peace, Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture, African Union; Minister Akin Adesina, Federal Ministry of Agricultural and Rural Development, Nigeria; and Dr Jimmy Smith, Director General of ILRI representing CGIAR.



CGIAR communicators in a fun and light moment in front of the CGIAR booth with Dr Adama Traore, Vice Board Chair of AfricaRice (rightmost).



CGIAR booth at the FARA@15 celebration.

Help conserve electricity!

Before leaving your workplace at the end of the day, make sure that you have:

1. Powered off all unnecessary electrical office/ lab equipment;
2. Turned off air conditioners; and
3. Switched off all lights.



The side event on Youth engagement in agribusiness featured a panel discussion with (L-R) Dr Chrys Akem, IITA; Dr Zwenhamo Albert Chiteka, Africa University; Dr Simon Mwaze, CCARDESA; Dir Aderemi Abioye, Federal Ministry of Agricultural and Rural Development, Nigeria; Dr Fina Opio, ASARECA. Dr Gbassey Tarawali facilitated the discussion.