



Making food safe: Two projects to combat aflatoxin contamination in Tanzania launched

The fight to control contamination of key staple foods in Africa by mycotoxins—poisonous chemicals secreted by naturally occurring fungi which attack crops in the field and during storage, making them unfit for human and livestock consumption at high levels of contamination—has been stepped up in Tanzania with the launch of two new research initiatives.

The first research initiative will document the extent of mycotoxin contamination in food and the second will develop a comprehensive and lasting solution to reduce mycotoxins in the country to improve the health and livelihoods of millions of families and reduce loss of income due to outlawed trade of contaminated food.

Among the key targeted mycotoxins is aflatoxin produced by the fungus *Aspergillus flavus*. Dubbed the ‘silent killer’, it has been shown to cause liver cancer and suppress the body’s immune system at high levels of contamination, while the most severe levels of poisoning result in liver failure and death. Some studies indicate that aflatoxin contamination could be responsible for critically impairing the growth and development of children.

Mycotoxins are also passed on to human beings when they consume infected meat or milk.

Studies by the Tanzania Food and Drugs Administration (TFDA) have documented levels of aflatoxins in



Participants at the launch of two projects to combat mycotoxins

maize, the country’s number one staple food, that are way above the recommended maximum limits. However, knowledge on the extent of the problem across the country is lacking, hampering awareness and efforts to control it.

The first project, a 6-month research funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under the Feed the Future initiative, will establish the extent and spread of mycotoxin contamination of maize and cassava at the homestead and in markets, focusing on Dodoma and Manyara.

The second initiative seeks to develop a safe and natural biocontrol technology that can effectively reduce aflatoxin contamination of maize and groundnut in the field and during storage. This is funded by Meridian Institute on behalf of

the Partnership for Aflatoxin Control in Africa (PACA) which was created at the recommendations of the 7th Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Program (CAADP) Partnership Platform where the urgent need to control mycotoxin contamination was emphasized.

The two projects were launched on 18–19 April in Dar es Salaam. The 2-day meeting, organized by IITA, brought together all the partners to plan on project implementation.

The Tanzanian partners for the two projects include the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Cooperatives, Sokoine University of Agriculture, TFDA, Tropical Pesticides Research Institute, USDA-ARS, Doreo Partners, and African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF).

With a visit, IITA got Ajibode Road rehabilitated



Renovation of Ajibode road in progress

One visit, and the Ajibode Road is getting rehabilitated. On 25 November 2011 DG Nteranya Sanginga paid a courtesy visit to the Governor of Oyo State, Abiola Ajimobi. The DG was accompanied by Dr. Gbassey Tarawali.

During the visit, Sanginga made a case for stronger ties between Oyo State and IITA, and also the rehabilitation of Ajibode road—a by-pass—that links Ibadan town to IITA headquarters.

Governor Ajimobi replied, “It will be done. In the days ahead you will see the commencement of work on the road.”

In less than a week, work commenced on the road and this has continued with a sustained momentum. While it is the state’s responsibility to construct roads, sometimes competing needs such as health and power supply get higher attention.

The road construction demonstrates the importance of reaching out; it will reduce the rigors of driving to work in traffic jams for many IITA staff, and will also ease the movement of agricultural products in the state.

Former Deputy Governor, Chris Akomas, visits IITA

Former Deputy Governor of Abia State, Mr. Chris Akomas, recently paid a courtesy call on IITA DG Nteranya Sanginga in Ibadan.

During the visit, Akomas, a former IITA staff, raised concern over the high rate of unemployment in Nigeria and Africa especially among the youths.

Acknowledging that agriculture could tame the ugly trend, he called on governments and other relevant stakeholders to take urgent steps to address the trend.

Receiving the former deputy governor, Sanginga highlighted the institute's efforts towards reducing poverty and improving livelihoods.

He said agriculture is one of the most potent weapons that Nigeria and other African nations could use in solving the unemployment problem.

The IITA DG noted that unless the youths are effectively engaged, the level of unemployment could worsen the security and economic development of African nations.

He promised that IITA would use its expertise in the area of job creation through agriculture to ensure that youths will be gainfully employed.

Corroborating the IITA DG's position, DDG for Partnerships and Capacity Building, Kenton Dashiell, said the institute was stepping up efforts in capacity building and partnership to provide youths with the



L-R: IITA DDG for Partnerships and Capacity Building Kenton Dashiell, former Deputy Governor (Abia) Chris Akomas, and IITA DG Nteranya Sanginga after a meeting in Ibadan.

necessary tools that would help them make a living.

Akomas, thereafter, toured the IITA campus and was received by former colleagues and friends in the different units.

Boosting production through smarter farming practices

African soils are old and poor in minerals but are expected to support agricultural production of resource-poor farmers who lack the financial capital and knowledge, among others, to apply inputs such as fertilizers. How then can agronomists work with the farmers to ensure that they can get the most out of their often mixed farming systems using whatever little resources they have? This was the key focus of



a seminar presentation by Piet Van Asten, a systems agronomist based in Uganda and coordinator of the Consortium for

Improving Agriculture-based Livelihoods in Central Africa (CIALCA) project.

Through yield-gap analysis which looks at the actual productivity of small-holder farmers against the maximum yield that they can get under the same conditions, Van Asten says they have been able to identify the factors that constrain banana production in Rwanda, Burundi, and Uganda.

Speaking at a seminar titled 'Trade-offs and synergies in perennial-based farming systems: balancing time, space and people' held on 15 March at IITA-Tanzania, in Dar es Salaam, Van Asten said that they had identified poor soils as one of the most important constraints to crop production. They are old, originating from old parent rocks, and have little fertility.

Using inputs such as fertilizer is one of the best-bet technologies to sell to farmers. However, he cautioned, fertilizer must be applied based on the actual soil deficiency and should consider factors such as distance to market and banana prices.

For example, he said, through research, they established that potassium, which plays a big role in banana production, was lacking in the soils. The addition of the mineral to the soil led to great gains in production. Furthermore, he said, the plants that received adequate potassium fared better in times of drought.

Other practices that were found to increase yield include intercropping banana and coffee. Van Asten said the farmers got more out of their land by growing the two crops together than having either alone. Coffee, a shade-loving plant performed better when growing under banana plants, which in turn gave the farmer extra income and food. These findings, he said, are slowly leading to a change of heart among policymakers who have for a long time preached monocropping of coffee in Rwanda and Burundi. This is because coffee is an import foreign exchange earner and they did not want anything to affect its production.

Easter Splash!!!

The Hotel and Catering Unit (HOTCAT) organized an Easter Splash with music, dancing, and a raffle draw. The program was held at the Sports Center and coincided with the Easter celebrations.

More than 250 staff members participated with lucky winners in the raffle draw going home with prizes.

Easter Splash!!!



Dashiell picking a lucky winner in the raffle draw

Sportsfest 2012 kicks off on May 2

The annual IITA sports festival will kick off on Wednesday, 2 May, at 3:00 p.m. with a parade of colors.

The 2012 sportsfest will feature 12 different games including soccer, table tennis, lawn tennis, volleyball, scrabble, monopoly, and swimming among others.