



AFRICAN AGRICULTURAL TECHNOLOGY FOUNDATION
FONDATION AFRICAINE POUR LES TECHNOLOGIES AGRICOLES

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PROJECT DEVELOPS FIRST EVER RICE HYBRIDS FOR FARMERS IN AFRICA

Rice farmers in Africa are set to dramatically increase their productivity with the new hybrid varieties that are capable of yielding up to 7 tonnes per hectare

Nairobi, Wednesday, 4 May 2016: Africa will soon have its own rice hybrids thanks to a public-private partnership project, the Hybrid Rice: Breeding by Design Project, that has developed the first ever indigenous hybrid rice in Sub Saharan Africa (SSA). The varieties which have been developed using the 2-line rice hybrid technology have the potential to produce 7 tonnes per hectare.

Kenya will be among the first countries to benefit from this pioneering breakthrough in rice breeding in SSA as early as next year considering that two hybrids are already undergoing national performance trials. Farmers in Tanzania are likely to get access to the hybrids in 2018.

The project is further evaluating the performance of 127 rice hybrids for advancement to national performance trials, according to Dr Kayode Sanni, the Project Manager.

Hybrid rice seeds currently being planted in Africa are either imported from Asia or America. Egypt, is the only country in Africa that has developed its own rice hybrids. With this breakthrough, Africa will realise its own high yielding hybrid seeds, consequently boosting production and moving closer to self-sufficiency in rice production.

This is indeed good news to farmers, seed companies and rice consumers in SSA. While global production of rice has risen steadily from 132 million tonnes in 1960 to 491.5 million tonnes in 2015, Africa has not contributed much to the increase, producing only 3 per cent, with Asia accounting for 90 per cent of the global production.

Rice demand on the continent exceeds production and Africa has been forced to rely heavily on importing large quantities of rice to meet demand at a very huge cost. In 2014, for instance, Africa imported 13 million tonnes costing over US \$5billion.

With demand increasing at between 6-12 percent over the last 10 years, Dr Sanni warns the cost is likely to increase unless there is drastic increase in local production.

SSA produces 14.8 million of milled rice per year, but consumes nearly double that amount at 26.4 million tonnes of milled rice per year. Except for a few countries that have attained self-sufficiency in rice production, as many as 21 of the 39 rice-producing countries in Africa import between 50 and 99 per cent of their rice requirements.

Kenya is one of the countries that have had to heavily rely on imports. The country's annual demand of milled rice is 550,000 tonnes. With an annual production of 102,000 tonnes, the imported 420,000 tonnes in 2015 were not enough to cater for demand, leaving the country with a deficit of 15,000 tonnes. Uganda on her part imported 53.8 percent of her rice requirements of 223,000 tonnes. Uganda produces 143,000 tonnes of milled rice per year.

With an annual production of 1,700,000 tonnes and an annual consumption of 1,770,000 tonnes, Tanzania is the only country in East Africa that appears to be heading towards self-sufficiency in rice with annual imports accounting for only 5.6 percent.

“Hybrid rice technology revolutionized rice production in Asia dramatically increasing productivity from an average of 1.89 tonnes per hectare in 1949 to 6.71 in 2012, and it will do the same for Africa,” states Dr Denis Kyetere, Executive Director African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF), that coordinates the Hybrid Rice project. ‘Now that we have also acquired the 2-line hybrid rice technology, Africa should be self-sufficient in rice production and even compete globally for exports, and not imports,’ added Dr Kyetere.

Africa's inability to reach self-sufficiency in rice is the result of a combination of several factors in the rice industry. The continent suffers low rice productivity averaging 2.2 t/ha against the global average of 3.4 t/ha. This is largely caused by lack of high performing varieties, poor seed systems making it difficult for farmers to access certified and high quality seeds, and vagaries of weather brought about by climate change. Farmers are further discouraged from investing in rice due to high production costs that make their products more costly and hence less competitive in the market.

Unlike maize, there is insufficient private sector investment in rice production in Africa, an issue Dr Sanni attributes to lack of hybrid rice technologies. “Historically, hybrid crop model has been used to leverage private sector involvement in agriculture. Besides offering significant yield gains to farmers, hybrid technologies also offer viable agri-businesses to seed companies through sustained seed sales. Investment in rice production by seed companies can only be encouraged by using hybrid rice technology. The huge African rice deficits are indeed a great business opportunity for seed companies,” states Sanni

For hybrid rice technology to take root in Africa, both the public and the private sectors will need to appreciate the big business opportunities and increase their investment in rice production. The increased investments could be channeled to addressing the challenges facing adoption of hybrid rice technology such as unavailability of parental lines, lack of capacity on hybrid rice technology, and inadequate awareness on hybrid rice benefits to farmers.

About Hybrid Rice: Breeding by Design Project (<http://hybrid-rice.aatf-africa.org/>)

The Hybrid Rice: Breeding by Design Project is a public private partnership whose goal is to improve food security and rural livelihoods among African small-scale rice producers, by developing hybrid rice with significant yield advantage and create sustainable hybrid rice agro-businesses to support rice farming in East, West and Southern Africa. The project aims to develop 2-line hybrid rice germplasm in selected African countries to ensure that, through private companies and public institutions in Africa, the technology reaches farmers and increases their rice yields and income streams. The project, coordinated by AATF, is being implemented in partnership with Hybrids East Africa Ltd responsible for developing the rice hybrids, parental lines, and also training other partners on 2-line hybrid development and production; aWhere who are developing the necessary IT tools to support germplasm development; and the National Agricultural Research Systems who are providing technical backstopping services, testing and developing germplasm. The project is funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

About AATF (<http://www.aatf-africa.org>)

AATF is a not-for-profit organisation established to access, develop, adapt and deliver appropriate agricultural technologies for sustainable use by smallholder farmers in Sub-Saharan Africa through innovative partnerships and effective stewardship along the entire value chain. AATF provides expertise and know-how that facilitates the identification, access, development, delivery and utilisation of appropriate agricultural technologies. AATF works towards food security and poverty reduction in Sub-Saharan Africa, and its structure and operations draw upon the best practices and resources of both the public and private sectors. AATF is a registered charity under the laws of England and Wales and has been given a tax-exempt status in the USA. It is incorporated in Kenya and in the UK and has been granted host country status by the Government of Kenya where it is headquartered and is registered as a charity in Nigeria.
