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Press Release

Ghana launches first home-grown GM crop



The Representative of Northern Regional Minister, Hon Sani Alhassan Saliu supported by Nyankpala Chief, Naayab Nyankpalana Mohammed Ibrahim, AATF Executive Director, Dr Canisius Kanangire, CSIR Director General, Prof. Paul Bosu displaying the newly launched PBR Cowpea variety in Tamale. – Photo: AATF

(Ghana: Tamale – July 25th, 2024) The National Seed Council, a technical body responsible for the approval of seed varieties for release in Ghana, has officially allowed the distribution of the Pod Borer Resistant (PBR) Cowpea seed variety to Ghanaian farmers.

ALL CORRESPONDENCE MUST BE ADDRESSED TO THE DIRECTOR

The variety developed by the Savanna Agricultural Research Institute (SARI), one of the research institutions under the umbrella of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, marked the debut of Ghana's first Genetically Modified crop into the country's agricultural system.

The distribution ceremony followed an environmental release approval granted by the National Biosafety Authority, Ghana's competent agency for the regulation of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) as well as a recommendation for commercial release by the National Variety Release and Registration Committee of the National Seed Council.

The Pod Borer Resistant cowpea was developed by scientists at SARI after nearly ten years of both confined and on-farm trials in collaboration with an international network of organizations across western Africa, Australia, the USA, and was coordinated by the African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF).

Speaking at the ceremony, the Northern Regional Minister, Hon. Sani Alhassan Saliu said the milestone underscores the dedication and commitment of Ghanaian scientists and the unwavering support from various stakeholders in the agricultural sector to tackle one of the

most disruptive pests militating against the cultivation of cowpea in the country.

Hon Shani Alhassan Shaibu, represented by the Tolon District Chief Executive, Mr. Fuseini Moshie noted that farmers in the country had in the past addressed the challenges by applying chemical sprays, which can be injurious to humans and the environment, adding that the determination of the scientists at SARI has not only provided succor for farmers but saved the country foreign exchange hitherto used in the importation of chemical sprays.

Also speaking, the Northern Regional Director of Agriculture, Hajjia Hawa Musah, who acknowledged the importance of the development to the Ghanaian economy, said that it has the potential to make Ghana a powerhouse in cowpea production in the sub-region.

The Regional Director noted that Ghana currently imports a substantial amount of its cowpea consumption from Niger, Mali, and Nigeria; adding that with the debut of Pod Borer Resistant cowpea variety, farmers can scale up their production and in no time, the country can become self-sufficient in cowpea production.

Dr. Canisius Kanangire, AATF Executive Director, said in a presentation that the development and release of the PBR Cowpea in Ghana is a promise kept. "Over a decade ago,

AATF made a commitment to the government and people of Ghana to solve the challenges Ghanaian farmers faced in the cultivation of cowpea, today we are happy to report that we have kept that promise.”

Dr. Canisius said that AATF has been collaborating with the Ghanaian government to provide innovative solutions to the numerous challenges facing farmers.

According to him, AATF believes that the agricultural sector is a key foundational pillar as Africa consolidates its economic growth and carves out its new position as a major global economic powerhouse and the next growth market in the world. “AATF was formed in response to the need for an effective mechanism that would facilitate and support negotiation for technology access and delivery and formation of appropriate partnerships to manage the development & deployment of innovative technologies for use by smallholder farmers in Sub-Saharan Africa.”

Prof. Paul Bosu, Director General of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), said the CSIR is committed to delivering on its mandate of making technologies responsive to the needs of the people of Ghana and to spur national development in an exponential manner. It is in the light of this that one of its institutes has collaborated with partners in the West

African sub-region and beyond to deliver this scientific breakthrough for local cowpea farmers. He praised the resilience and tenacity of his scientists in the institutes, especially in the areas of technology development. He was glad that CSIR has brought hope to cowpea farmers and they will soon smile and be alleviated from poverty.

Dr. Francis Kusi, Director of CSIR – Savanna Agricultural Research Institute (SARI) - said the genetically modified cowpea variety called “Songotra T” was developed by scientists at the Institute. He said the Institute has been working on this variety for nearly a decade. During this period, the Institute followed strict regulatory processes from start to end. According to him, the National Biosafety Authority, which is the competent national authority responsible for regulating GM crops in Ghana, has conducted comprehensive risk assessment on the variety and they have concluded that this variety is substantially equivalent to any conventionally bred cowpea variety. Thus, they declared it to be as safe for use as food and feed as conventional cowpea varieties. He was excited that Ghanaians can now have access to cowpea with less insecticide residues because growers of this variety no longer need to spray eight times or more; they only need two sprays. This was a huge saver on cost and on the health of insecticide applicators.

USAID provided support to the researchers through Feed the Future, the U.S. Government's global hunger and food security initiative.

About AATF (www.aatf-africa.org)

Founded in 2003 to address Africa's food security prospects through agricultural technology, AATF believes that the agricultural sector is a key foundational pillar as Africa consolidates its economic growth and carves out its new position as a major global economic powerhouse and the next growth market in the world. It was formed in response to the need for an effective mechanism that would facilitate and support negotiation for technology access and delivery and the formation of appropriate partnerships to manage the development & deployment of innovative technologies for use by smallholder farmers in Sub-Saharan Africa.

About CSIR-SARI (www.csir-sari.org)

Becoming autonomous in 1994 and is one of 13 institutes under CSIR. Serving the Northern, Upper East, and Upper West Regions, CSIR-SARI focuses on developing technologies to enhance food and fibre crop production. These efforts are grounded in sustainable systems that maintain or enhance soil fertility, addressing the unique agricultural challenges of the region. The institute aims to

become a leading research and development (R&D) organization, aligning agricultural research closely with farmer needs and national development goals. By specializing in crops such as maize, rice, groundnut, cowpea, sorghum, and soybean, CSIR-SARI works with national and international partners to ensure its innovations reach and benefit the farming community, significantly contributing to food security and economic growth.

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