



AFRICA NEEDS HIGHER YEILDING MAIZE PRODUCTION

Africa needs higher yielding maize and other grain crops to meet its food requirements. Africa still imports 25% of its annual grain requirements. Agricultural biotechnology is one of the technologies that can be used to increase maize production, says Professor Jocelyn Webster, executive director of AfricaBio.

Speaking at the South African National Consumer Union's general meeting in Pretoria, she said Africa's maize production is the lowest in the world, 1.7t/ha compared to an average 4t/ha globally. Most African countries depend on agriculture for foreign currency earning but very rarely succeed in doing so due to drought and disease.

Critics of GMOs claim the technology has no benefits for resource-poor small-scale farmers. The opposite has been proved. AfricaBio (an organization for stakeholders in the GMO industry), in partnership with Sabina Khoza, president of the Gauteng National African Farmers' Union (NAFU), carried out trials on half a hectare each of GM and non-GM maize.

The crops were planted under identical conditions. The GM crop yielded 27% more maize. More than 70% of Africa's population depends on agriculture as a sole source of food and income. Biotechnology can offer Africa increased yields, as well as develop faster-growing, safer, more nutritious agricultural products and control pests and diseases that can wipe out entire crops.

"These are the results that consumers should hear, along with information on the safety and control measures that are carried out under the GMO Act executed by the National Department of Agriculture. Scientific tests worldwide have confirmed that GMO products are safe, pose no threat to the environment and have a practical application for Africa," said Prof Webster.