

AGRICULTURAL BIOTECH INDUSTRY FORUM (ABI) PRESS RELEASE

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ISAAA Brief 54 launched : BIOTECH CROPS CONTINUE TO HELP MEET THE CHALLENGES OF INCREASED POPULATION AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Africa planted a total of 3.14 million hectares of biotech crops

South Africa's biotech crop adoption went up a further three per cent (3%) in just one year between 2017 and 2018, a new report has revealed. According to the Global Status of Commercialized Biotech/GM Crops in 2018 (ISAAA Brief 54) launched during the The Hans Lombard memorial information session on Tuesday in Centurion, the country's average biotech crop adoption rose from 93% in 2017 to 96% in 2018, sustaining its ranking among the top 10 biotech crop countries over the last two decades.

The Hans Lombard memorial information session on the GM/Biotech crop status in South Africa, is an annual press conference organized by the Agricultural Biotech Industry Forum (ABI). By hosting this conference, the South African seed industry, through the ABI Forum, aims to inform and educate the public on the benefits of biotechnology, address groundless fears and introduce new technology. Dr Margaret Karembu Director, ISAAA AfriCenter presented the global biotech figures while Rodney Bell; CEO CropLife SA, informed the conference on the South African status.

Brief 54, compiled by the International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications (ISAAA), shows that South Africa completed 21 years of successful commercialization of biotech crops with a total of 2.74 million hectares planted on three principal biotech crops namely- cotton, maize, and soybeans. Most farmers in SA have adopted biotech crops with 87% adoption of biotech maize, 95% biotech soybean and 100% of biotech cotton, says the report.

It further shows the area planted to biotech cotton rose to 42,654ha in 2018 from 37,406ha in 2017, representing a 14% increase in hectareage. However, the combined area planted to maize, soybean and cotton was 3.073 million hectares, a slight decrease from the 2017/18 planting of 3.1 million hectares. The decline was mainly from maize and soybean plantings. For maize, the main factor was delayed rains and given the more ideal planting window is around October-December. This forced some farmers in the western parts of the country to postpone planting into 2019.

According to the report, a total of 70 countries adopted biotech crops through cultivation and importation in 2018, the 23rd year of continuous biotech crop adoption. Twenty-six countries (21 developing and 5 industrialised countries) planted 191.7 million hectares of biotech crops, adding 1.9 million hectares to the record of plantings in 2017.

Africa continues to make steady progress in the adoption of biotech crops with Nigeria becoming the first country in the world to approve biotech cowpea, thus, adding a new biotech crop to the global biotech basket.

The Kingdom of eSwatini (formerly Swaziland) joined South Africa and Sudan in planting biotech crops in Africa, with commercial planting of insect resistant (IR) Bt cotton on an initial launch of 250 hectares. This brought the number of African countries currently growing biotech crops to three. Nigeria, Ethiopia, Kenya and Malawi granted approvals for planting biotech cotton as proof that Africa is ready for biotech crop adoption.

"The world is in a technological advancement trajectory. The green revolution that had taken the world by storm in the second half of the 20th Century is quickly transitioning into gene revolution." Dr Margaret Karembu said. "Plant breeding is evolving and progressing into genome editing, a more precise and

accurate technology to effectively develop more productive, highly nutritious and climate-resilient crops for our rapidly-increasing population,” she added.

The continuous adoption of biotech crops by farmers worldwide indicates that biotech crops continue to help meet global challenges of hunger, malnutrition, and climate change.

In 2018, it was reported in the *United Nation’s State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World* that hunger is growing year after year for three consecutive years, and at the levels equivalent to the records a decade ago. Furthermore, the 2017 Global Report on Food Crises revealed that hunger and malnutrition continue to rise, with around 108 million individuals in 48 countries at risk or in severe food insecurity. Biotech crops, developed with improved traits such as increased yield, more resistance to pests, improved nutrition, among others, are undeniably necessary to address these global challenges affecting the lives of so many families globally.

“GM technology has contributed to all facets of food security. By increasing yields and reducing losses, it contributed to food availability for more families. By enabling farmers to improve their processes and join the modern supply chain, it improved physical access to food. Through raising farmer and rural incomes, it improved economic access to food. Through rigorous standards of food safety and hygiene programs, it contributed to better food utilization,” said Dr. Paul S. Teng, ISAAA Board Chair, “While agricultural biotechnology is not the only key in enhancing global food security, it is an important scientific tool in the multi-disciplinary toolkit.”

Biotech crop plantings have increased ~113-fold since 1996, with an accumulated area of 2.5 billion hectares, showing that biotechnology is the fastest adopted crop technology in the world. In countries with long years of high adoption, particularly the USA, Brazil, Argentina, Canada, and India, adoption rates of major crops are at levels close to 100%, indicating that farmers favour biotechnology over the conventional varieties.

To address the specific needs and requirements of producers and consumers some diverse biotech crops with various traits became available in 2018. These biotech crops include –

- potatoes with non-bruising, non-browning, reduced acrylamide and late blight resistant traits;
- insect resistant and drought tolerant sugarcane;
- non-browning apples and
- high oleic acid canola and safflower.

Caption pic 1 – Willem Engelbrecht acted as MC for the 2nd annual Hans Lombard memorial information session on the GM/Biotech crop status in South Africa with Dr Margaret Karembu Director, ISAAA AfriCenter and Rodney Bell; CEO CropLife SA.

Caption pic 2 – Some of the industry people and media who attended the ABI Forum’s press conference at Centurion on Tuesday.

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ISAAA is a not-for-profit international organization that shares the benefits of crop biotechnology to various stakeholders, particularly resource-poor farmers in developing countries, through knowledge sharing initiatives and the transfer and delivery of proprietary biotechnology applications. ISAAA's global knowledge sharing network and partnerships in the research and development continuum provide a powerful combination of science-based information and appropriate technology to those who need to make informed decisions about their acceptance and use. ISAAA releases the annual global biotech crop adoption report and provides information on approved GM crop events through the GM Approval Database.