



SUCCESS STORY

Biosafety in Burkina Faso: Ensuring the safe rollout of genetically-modified cotton

Strengthening the Burkina Faso National Biosafety Agency



Photo: WACIP Burkina Faso

The opening ceremony of the Biosafety Information Workshop on March 2010 in the eastern region of Burkina Faso.



Photo: WACIP Burkina Faso

Over 6,000 copies of a summary of Burkina's biosafety law were translated into the three most popular national languages (Mooré, Jula and Gulmancema) and distributed across the cotton-zones of SOFITEX, FASO COTON and SOCOMA.

Biotechnology has become a hot topic in Burkina Faso now that the country is growing cotton genetically-modified with the Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) gene. After conducting careful experiments during the 2003-2008 growing seasons, Burkina Faso, the world's 11th country to have adopted biotechnology, is now reaping the benefits as it expands cultivation of Bt cotton to ensure food security while preserving the environment.

From a few research plots in 2008, Burkina Faso grew 125,000 hectares of Bt cotton in 2009 (28% of total cotton area), and 360,000 hectares (75% of total area) in 2010. Farmers, very satisfied with the 30% yield increase compared to conventional cotton, further appreciated cutting back from six to two pesticide sprayings, shaving 60% of the pesticide bill per hectare. All told, net revenues per hectare for Bt cotton in 2010 were about 90% higher than for conventional cotton fields. Additionally, farmers use less labor, cause less damage to the environment and limit their exposure to dangerous chemicals.

Nonetheless, genetically-modified crops trigger hope, fear, and above all, controversy among the general public.

In 2010, the U.S. Government, through USAID's West African Cotton Improvement Program (WACIP), funded activities to help the National Biosafety Agency (ANB) of Burkina Faso to carry out its critical regulatory and public awareness role as the country expanded its use of biotechnology.

Thanks to this support, ANB carried out several important activities in 2010 including: training members of its biosafety bureau in biotechnological risk evaluation and management; holding three biosafety information workshops from the country's three cotton-regions; organizing Open Houses to explain its mandate and function to students from high schools and colleges in Ouagadougou; training cotton extension agents - who in turn will train farmers - on the biotechnology and biosafety legislation; translating and diffusing extracts from that legislation into three national languages; and organizing local language radio broadcasts of those same materials across the country. Over 5,000 people have already benefited from these activities.

The outcomes of the ANB activities were remarkable according to one of the participants at the Bobo-Dioulasso training workshop, Mrs Suzane Sidibé (born Toé). "The workshop was really timely! We [extension agents] were looking for trustworthy information. I believe after this workshop, we can now backstop the Bt roll-out process with much more serenity."