

**Press Release N°217/2013****Regional Conference on Aflatoxin Challenge in West African States**

Theme: Improving Health, Trade and Food Security through Regional Efforts to Mitigate Aflatoxin Contamination Venue: Accra, Ghana, 18-20 November 2013

**Accra, Ghana -18 – November 2013:**

Consideration to Aflatoxin issues from the policy community has increased in recent years, with growing recognition of their health risks as well as the barrier they pose to market development. Today marked the opening of a three-day regional conference workshop on Aflatoxin Challenges in West African States in Accra, Ghana.

As its theme of improving health, trade and food security

through regional efforts to mitigate Aflatoxin contamination, the workshop aims to cover a wide range of areas for developing a common understanding of the steps being taken to control Aflatoxin. Because Aflatoxins are a pervasive environmental risk, it was mentioned on the workshop that its control will require a multifaceted approach.

The workshop co-organised by The partnership for Aflatoxin Control in Africa of the African Union Commission, reminded that the conducive climatic conditions in the continent is one of the major factors that raises the fighting scale against Aflatoxin. Traditional crop production practices, inadequate harvesting during and storage practices and lack of awareness are also major factors that should be given attention to tackle Aflatoxin contamination throughout the continent.

With its core objective of identifying technical, institutional and policy opportunities to address the Aflatoxin challenges in West African States, the workshop has also revealed the importance of setting regional priorities to address the Aflatoxin problems in the agriculture, trade and health sectors.

On her opening remark, Dr. Janet Edeme, Head of Division, Rural economy, DREA-AUC has reminded the participants that in the series of tackling Aflatoxin, we should begin with what is known about the health risks, as this is the foundation for public health policies. Next, efforts to build new market channels and incentives that can improve Aflatoxin control should be considered according to the high panel of the workshop.

The workshop also conveyed technical presentations on ECOWAP by Mr. Ernest Aubee from ECOWAS who also made presentation on Aflatoxins and Trade and Policy. Dr. Amare Ayalew, Programme Manager PACA, then presented the general explanation of the overview of the partnership for Aflatoxin control in Africa (PACA). “PACA is the Innovative consortium aiming at coordinating Aflatoxin mitigation and management across health, agriculture and trade sectors in Africa “ said Dr. Amare Ayalew.

Following his presentation, Mr. John Lamb, principal Associate/Scientist from Abt Associates talked about the overview of Global Food Safety Partnership (GFSP) indicating that PACA is now becoming a leading guideline for tackling Aflatoxins not only in the continent but the world. Dr. Martin Kimanya from Nelson Mandela African Institute of Science and Technology (MN-AIST) has also presented about Aflatoxins and their impact on Health. Furthermore, the first day workshop meeting has also included the presentation from Dr. Ranajit Banyopadhyay, from IITA about Aflatoxins and Agriculture, and technology solutions available for abating the Aflatoxin Challenge.

The participants had also the chance to pose their queries for the panellists on the issues such as how to improve or handle the conducive climate issue in the continent. The number of countries in ECOWAS that implemented regulations on Aflatoxins were some of the questions raised during the first day meeting.

The Workshop thus in the coming three days, will aim to provide several perspectives on solutions for reducing Aflatoxins. Dealing with the issues of coordination will be one of the significant tasks that all participants should try to focus on during the workshop according to Dr. Janet Edeme. It was also reminded by the panellists that each representative should also consider on a concrete way of putting their money on the table to tackle the financial engagements for mitigating Aflatoxin contaminations in the continent.

Even though there are lots of activities underway to tackle the subject matter it is a fact that there's still a long way to go forth, from new technology solutions and regulations to Policies and institutional capacity building to consider the issue solved.

Feteh M Tebeje
Directorate of Information and Communication
Fetehm@africa-union.org
Tel: +251 115517700 (2558)