

# EAST AFRICA WINS BBI GRANT

Scientists from Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda in collaboration with experts from USA have won a three-four year research grant that may total up to USD 350,000. The money will be used to conduct “baseline biodiversity impact studies of transgenic Bt cotton on wild ecosystems in the East African region” and the collaborators are William Hamisy, TPRI, Tanzania, Charles Watura, KARI, Kenya, Simon Byabagambi, Makerere University, Uganda, Roshan Abdallah, TPRI, Tanzania, John Pleasants, Iowa State University, USA, Jonathan Wendel, Iowa State University, USA, and Neal Stewart, University of Tennessee, USA.

The Biotechnology-Biodiversity Interface (BBI) competitive grant program is a component of Program for Biosafety Systems component that focuses on the need to better understand the interaction between genetically engineered crops, agriculture, and the environment. The program was developed because environmental risks and benefits, and applicability of transgenic crops to the agricultural realities vary in different ecological regions and must therefore be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

BBI grants support research that provides information needed to assess the potential effects of transgenic crops on wild biodiversity, and to design risk management strategies appropriate to the country/region agricultural systems.

The information generated by this research should be used to:

- Assist regulatory bodies in making science-based decisions.
- Develop strategies for managing any identified risks in the context of agro-ecosystems.
- Build collaboration between agricultural research and environmental conservation communities.
- Build capacity to conduct research in assessing and managing risks to wild biodiversity.

The awarding of BBI research grants started in 2004 and the cotton team above is the third major beneficiary in East Africa. In 2005, two projects from East Africa, ‘Gene flow and fitness studies of hybrids between cultivated rice (*Oryza sativa*) and its wild/weedy relatives in the East African region’ and ‘Can Bt-cowpea be deployed in Africa without a demographic explosion of the wild cowpea populations’ received similar awards and these are lead by researchers from Nairobi University and from the International Centre for Insect Physiology and Ecology respectively.

A call for pre-proposal for the year 2006 was sent out in December 2005. It is a major achievement that East Africa hosts one of the three final proposals. Congratulations to the winning scientist who worked so hard and ably satisfied the stringent requirement of the grant.