

GM COTTON TRIAL APPROVED IN UGANDA by Arthur Makara, UNCST

The National Biosafety Committee (NBC), that is housed by the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST), sitting at its Ordinary meeting held on 23rd August 2007 discussed the report of its Technical Subcommittee that had been reviewing the application by National Semi-Arid Resources Research Institute (NaSARRI) to tests Genetically Modified (GM) Cotton with resistance to the bollworm and herbicide tolerance. The NBC made an approval in 'Principle' for the trials to be conducted. The approval in 'Principle' implies that the NBC recommended that before the research permit is issued by UNCST to the applicant, a number of conditions have to be met including taking the members of the NBC Technical Subcommittee to Mubuku, Kasese where one of the trials is proposed to be conducted so that they can carry out an on-site inspection. The other proposed site of trials is at NaSARRI, Serere. Confined Field Trials (CFTs) are studies that are made by scientists to collect data on any new varieties developed at research stations within the country or outside. Dr. Emeetai Areke, who is also the Director of NaSARRI, is the principal investigator of this research and heads a team of prominent Ugandan scientists who interested in researching in this new frontier of science for improvement of cotton productivity in Uganda. Dr. Areke says that the CFTs NaSARRI intends to conduct are just experimental studies and proof of concept from which the scientists shall gather data that will in future help them in the development of GM cotton suited for the Ugandan conditions. He further emphasizes the economic importance of the bollworm and weeds as major production constraints for small-scale cotton farmers in Uganda.