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A newsletter from Africa Rice Center (WARDA)

Rice-Guide launched for extension and farmer learning

Focusing on capacity building and farmer learning as part of a comprehensive strategy to manage the current rice crisis, Africa Rice Center (WARDA) has launched a one-stop online information source for extension and farmer learning tools on rice cultivation in Africa called Rice-Guide

<http://www.warda.org/warda/guide-rice.asp>

The Rice-Guide contains a series of videos on seed health and post-harvest technologies in various African languages, with information on how to obtain these videos. In the near future, videos and radio programs on integrated crop management practices based on Participatory Learning and Action Research approach will also be available.

“These will be translated into local languages for broadcasting to reach an estimated 300,000 farmers in sub-Saharan Africa and are expected to have a long-term effect on farmer productivity and the quality of the environment, particularly in lowland rice systems,” said Dr Paul Van Mele, Leader of Learning and Innovation Program at the Africa Rice Center.

In addition, the online source has practical field guides on rice production for various ecologies, integrated pest management as well as the NERICA® Compendium, which contains information on NERICA® ranging from planting to agro-processing. Tips on rice recipes are also available.



UNDP project confirms importance of participatory approach

Rice experts from seven West African countries attending a workshop held in Accra, Ghana, 25-27 March, confirmed that Participatory Varietal Selection (PVS)-Extension not only facilitates the introduction of multiple improved varieties in a shorter period of time, but also has the potential to reach a greater number of farmers.

The workshop was held to take stock of a 2-year project on PVS carried out with support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone and Ghana.

Irrigated NERICA performs well in Gambia

The Gambia is well known for the popularity of upland NERICA®. Recently the good performance of irrigated NERICA® varieties – WAS 161-B-9-2 and WAS 127-B-5-2 – is also making news. These varieties were introduced in the country by the Africa Rice Center (WARDA) St Louis Station.

Interestingly in The Gambia, many popular varieties are given local names based on the persons who have introduced the varieties to farmers. So WAS 161-B-9-2 is locally known as Sambou Mano and WAS 127-B-5-2 as Gaye Mano.

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UNDP project confirms

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Participants found that PVS-Extension increased farmers' access to high-quality upland and lowland varieties in all the project countries. They also noted that the success of any PVS activity largely depends on seed availability and therefore community based seed systems (CBSS) should be an integral part of the PVS exercise.

The workshop was inaugurated by Prof. Emmanuel Owusu-Bennoah, Director General of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and Chair of Programs Committee of the Africa Rice Center Board.

During the workshop, specialists from various disciplines, such as breeding, agronomy and social sciences, assessed the current model of PVS extension for effectiveness in delivering germplasm-based technologies.

"PVS-Extension is a strong tool of varietal dissemination where a large number of farmers can be exposed to promising varieties," said Dr Moussa Sié, Leader of Biodiversity and Genetic Improvement at Africa Rice Center.

The PVS approach gives farmers an opportunity to select improved varieties or lines using their own selection criteria. Dr Sié explained that the PVS process is a five-year program, including an initial three years for PVS-Research and the remaining two for PVS-Extension.

Participants recommended that PVS approaches should be expanded to other countries and should be adapted to the socioeconomic conditions of farmers and the farm typology. The need for training of seed producers and inspectors in seed production and post harvest handling was also highlighted.

Helping Africa develop crop adaptation strategies to climate change

Climate change is a major threat to sustainable growth and development in Africa, particularly because of the continent's high dependence on rainfed agriculture. To brace ourselves for the immediate future, adaptation strategies will be required, both in terms of varietal development and crop management.

To address this challenge, national and international experts met, 31 March to 1 April, in St Louis, Senegal to launch a project on "Developing rice and sorghum crop adaptation strategies for climate change in vulnerable environments in Africa (RISOCAS)."

Sites have been selected where extremes in temperature, humidity and altitude are found. The response of crop varieties to climate conditions will be used to validate a crop simulation model. The model will ultimately serve as a support tool for varietal selection under a changing climate.

The project will focus on three major cereal cropping systems of sub-Saharan Africa: irrigated rice, upland (dryland) rice, and sorghum. Studies will be conducted in selected sites in Senegal for irrigated rice, Madagascar for upland rice and Mali for sorghum.

As part of the project, relevant meteorological data, site-specific soil characteristics and water balances as well as parameters of growth and yield will be monitored. These data will be used to identify valuable traits for varietal improvement and to adapt, calibrate and field-validate crop models (based on the crop model 'SARRAH'). The resulting tools will allow predictive applications in the context of climate change scenarios.

"The potential users of the methodologies and tools are national research and extension programs, agro-meteorological forecasting and early-warning services such as AGRHYMET, and policy makers," said Dr Paul Kiepe, Leader of the Productivity Enhancement Program at Africa Rice Center.

The project is jointly carried out by the University of Hohenheim and Africa Rice Center in partnership with the Centre de coopération internationale en recherche agronomique pour le développement (CIRAD); Université Gaston Berger, Senegal, Centre national de la recherche appliquée au développement rural (FOFIFA), Madagascar and the Institut d'économie rurale (IER), Mali.

About 20 participants representing the project partners attended the launching workshop and developed work plans for the first year.

Training under WARDA-IRRI programmatic alignment

As part of activities undertaken under the framework of Africa Rice Center (WARDA)-International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) programmatic alignment, a training course on seed production was held, 10-20 March 2008 at Songhai Center, Benin.

Fifteen participants from nine countries (Ghana, Gambia, Liberia, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Kenya) attended the course.

Africa Rice Center scientists gave seminars on seed production and characteristics of NERICA®, plant breeding strategy, seed systems, seed health, crop nutrient, integrated pest management, phytosanitary and SMTA protocol and the rice research networks of Africa (ROCARIZ and ECARRN).

IRRI scientists covered rice and business and seed systems, the use of the Rice Knowledge Bank, crop establishment, water management and post-harvest technology.

Seminars

- Dr Lamin Dibba, Visiting Fellow working with Dr Aliou Diagne gave a seminar on “Nerica adoption and impact evidence for the Gambia”.
- Onasanya Amos, Research Assistant, Program 2, made a presentation on “CGIAR AGM 07”. Amos is the second member of the WARDA GSS staff to take part in a CGIAR annual meeting.
- David Millar, Science Writer and Maïmouna Diatta, French Editor gave a seminar on "How to write better".
- End-of-assignment seminar by Hiroaki Samejima, PDF, on ‘Screening of deep root rice varieties under field conditions in West Africa’.
- Dr Kabirou Ndiaye, Scientist from the Institut d’Economie Rurale, (IER) in Mali gave a seminar “National Research Center for rice in Mali”.

Visitors

- Dr. John Manful, Scientist from the Food Research Institute in Ghana, 22 February, to discuss potential collaboration on rice quality and post-harvest.
- Dr Bill Payne, Professor of Crop Physiology Texas A&M University, 5-6 March, to build contacts between WARDA, Texas A&M and the Norman Borlaug Institute for International Agriculture directed by Dr Edwin Price
- Dr Kabirou N’Diaye, Scientist at IER, 19-22 March, to explore possibilities of collaboration between WARDA and the ‘National Research Center for Rice in Mali’
- Dr Ernest Konguere from Central Africa Republic, 11-15 March, to discuss future collaboration
- Prof Wagbahi Jules Keli, Regional Director and Dr Amoncho Adiko, Director of Research programs of CNRA, Cote d’Ivoire, 6 March, to discuss possibilities for renewed research activities in Ivory Coast.
- Professor Jean Pierre Ezin, Commissioner for Science and Technology, African Union, 17 March to discuss future collaboration between the African Union and WARDA.