



PROGRAM FOR BIOSAFETY SYSTEMS

A partnership program for
biosafety capacity development

MALAWI

PBS Helps Lay the Foundation for Confined Field Trials

Since 2004, the Program for Biosafety Systems (PBS) has worked with the Government of Malawi to develop a fully functional biosafety regulatory system. With PBS support, the Government finalized Biosafety Regulations and Guidelines in 2007 and also appointed both a National Biosafety Regulatory Committee (NBRC) and a Biosafety Registrar to process, review, and provide advice on applications for confined field trials (CFTs) and general releases of GM crops. That same year, Malawi amended and adopted its 2002 Biosafety Act. This accelerated the adoption of a National Biotechnology Policy, which was approved in early 2008. Currently, the Government is preparing for a review of the first confined field trial of a genetically-modified (GM) crop, insect-resistant (Bt) cotton. PBS, in collaboration with the National Research Council of Malawi (NRCM), is

initiating training and capacity-building activities with regulators, trial managers, and inspectors of CFTs, and will support research and outreach initiatives to enhance understanding of biotechnology and biosafety.

Strategic Objectives

- Equip the NBRC to process and review GM crop applications
- Strengthen capacity of trial managers, NBRC members, the Biosafety Registrar, and inspectors to effectively review, conduct, oversee, and inspect CFTs
- Establish a research base for science-based biosafety decision making
- Increase public understanding of biotechnology and biosafety

Approach

In collaboration with national and international partners, PBS supports the following initiatives:

- Working to increase capacity and skills within the NBRC to carry out regulatory functions through hands-on training, workshops, and study tours (for example, to Uganda where field trials are ongoing).
- Developing materials to aid in confined field trial management, including CFT guidelines, a trial manager's handbook, and an inspector's handbook. Once these are finalized, PBS will provide training for target users to understand and follow the guidelines.
- Encouraging science-based decision-making around Bt cotton through two studies: 1) A survey of cotton insects in CFT areas to assess the potential impacts of growing Bt cotton (compared to non-Bt cotton) on both pests and beneficial in-

Local Partners

National Research Council of Malawi, National Biosafety Regulatory Committee, Biotechnology-Ecology Research and Outreach Consortium (BioEROC), Bunda College, University of Malawi Centre for Environmental Policy and Advocacy, Department of Agriculture Research Services, Environmental Affairs Department

International Partners

AfricaBio, Donald Danforth Plant Science Center

sects. 2) A socioeconomic study on the costs and benefits of adopting GM technology, as requested by cotton-growing farmers in the region.

- Improving public understanding and awareness of biotechnology and biosafety by forming a local communications taskforce, developing informative materials, and enhancing outreach via radio broadcasts and the BioEROC/PBS "Biotechnology Update" newsletter.

For more information:

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