

Press Release No.**Uganda holds aflatoxin business meeting**

August 1, 2016, Kampala, Uganda – The African Union Commission through the Partnership for Aflatoxin Control in Africa (PACA) is working to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of Governments to tackle the aflatoxin challenge in Africa.

Furthermore, the PACA Secretariat, housed at the AUC's Department for Rural Economy and Agriculture (DREA), is working closely with Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and local country stakeholders through country aflatoxin Steering Committees to support the preparation, execution, and oversight of country government-led, and stakeholder aligned plans.

Aflatoxins are natural compounds produced by the mould *Aspergillus flavus* and related species. They are highly toxic to humans and animals, causing liver disease and cancer. Chronic exposure to aflatoxins is also associated with stunting and immune system suppression. Aflatoxin-producing moulds affect grain and other food crops – maize and groundnuts in particular. The toxins could be carried over along the food chain. Aflatoxins cause health problems in livestock through contaminated feed, and in humans through unsafe levels in dietary staples.

As part of its vigorous agenda to mitigate aflatoxins in African countries, the PACA Secretariat convened the Uganda Business Meeting, from July 28-29, to provide a platform for stakeholders to agree on the funding strategy and implementation road map that will ensure sustainable and predictable funding for implementing the aflatoxin control action plan in the country.

H.E. Tumusiime Rhoda Peace, AUC's Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture opened the business meeting by assuring the Republic of Uganda, of the AUC's commitment to support implementation of the aflatoxin control action plan, which will contribute to the agenda to regain its markets, people's health and food security.

She commended the progress made by the Republic of Uganda in institutionalizing PACA in its farming systems through the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program (CAADP).

"We recognize that aflatoxins are one of the biggest challenges for agriculture, health, trade, food security and our economies. Exposure to these poisons can lead to high rates of liver cancer, associated death, stunted growth of our children and impaired immune systems leading to permanently compromised lives," Commissioner Tumusiime said. "The aflatoxin mitigation action plan is now owned by the Government and this event today, marks the beginning of a new and exciting chapter of joint implementation of actions that will lead to aflatoxin mitigation in the Country and the region."

Furthermore, Commissioner Tumusiime assured delegates that AUC would continue to work with the EAC, COMESA and NEPAD Agency to ensure that what is planned in Uganda is implemented successfully in the coming years.

Commissioner Tumusiime also officially launched the Uganda Mycotoxin Mitigation Steering Committee (UMMSC) which provides conceptual, strategic and policy guidance to the secretariat and Aflatoxin Technical Working Group (ATWG) – the Uganda Chapter, in the planning, implementation and coordination of mycotoxin mitigation activities in the country.



Commissioner Tumusiime launching the Uganda Mycotoxin Mitigation Steering Committee (UMMSC)

Hon. Ssempiija Vincent Bamulangaki Minister of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries, Uganda, represented by Ag. Director of extension services, Mrs. Beatrice Byarugaba, committed to incorporate the aflatoxins mitigation under the Ministry's Agriculture Sector Strategic Plan and to also take into account the multi-disciplinary roles of agriculture, health and trade ministries in fighting aflatoxins.

Hon. Bamulangaki noted that without mitigating aflatoxins, it would be difficult to fully develop the fisheries, animal and crop sub-sectors in the country.

Further, Dr. Patrick Tusiime, Commissioner, National Disease Control, representing the Ministry of Health, assured the meeting of the Ministry's support in advancing interventions that address the impact of Aflatoxins particularly within the preventative context of disease management, noting that a healthy nation is a productive nation!

The AUC provides leadership for PACA, and works with a steering committee representing farmers; consumers; research and technology organizations; healthcare and trade professionals; and the private sector. Together, the stakeholders aspire to achieve PACA's vision: an Africa free from the harmful effects of aflatoxins.

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