

Water Efficient Maize for Africa (WEMA)

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The Kenya-based African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF) has announced a new public-partnership initiative, called Water Efficient Maize for Africa (WEMA), for the development of drought tolerant and royalty-free maize varieties for Africa. The initiative will involve the use of marker-assisted technology and biotechnology. The African countries participating are: Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and South Africa. New drought-tolerance technologies have already been licensed without charge to AATF so they can be developed, tested, and eventually distributed to African seed companies through AATF to African small-scale farmers. The first conventional varieties developed by WEMA could be available after six to seven years of research and development, according to the press release. Genetically modified (GM) drought-tolerant maize hybrids will be available in about ten years, it says. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Howard G. Buffett Foundation, both based in the U.S., have contributed a total of US\$47 million to WEMA. The International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT) will provide conventionally developed drought tolerant high-yielding maize varieties that are adapted to African conditions, and expertise. Monsanto will provide proprietary germplasm, advanced breeding tools, and some expertise. Additionally, Monsanto and BASF will provide drought-tolerance transgenes that they have developed through their collaboration. These contributions will be provided without royalty. The national agricultural research systems of the African countries involved, farmers' groups, and seed companies who are participating as partners will contribute expertise and will be responsible for country-specific implementation, including project governance, testing, germplasm evaluation, seed production, and distribution. The McLaughlin-Rotman Centre for Global Health at the University of Toronto in Canada will conduct independent audits of WEMA. The press release can be viewed online at the link below.

<http://www.aatf-africa.org/newsdetail.php?newsid=95>