

## Agriculture: Africa's "Engine for Growth" - Plant science and biotechnology hold the key, Rothamsted Research, Harpenden, 12-14 October 2009



*Delegates at Africa Conference at Rothamsted. Reproduced by kind permission of Utopia Audiovisual*

The AAB symposium titled "Agriculture: Africa's engine for growth - Plant Science and Biotechnology hold the key" held at Rothamsted Research from 12-14 of October (2009) brought together about 50 scientists from Africa and 50 researchers from the rest of the world. The scientific programme, which also included a Funders Forum and a Schools event, focussed on how new advances in plant science research and developing technologies are being used to the benefit of African agriculture. This forum allowed a full and frank consideration of the roles of novel, dynamic, and relevant technologies and their possible applications in agriculture. The consensus view was that although improvements in farming practices and crop management are essential modern genetics must be utilized too. Intensification of global synergies and alliances are further required in order to apply multi-disciplinary approaches and make prudent and timely recommendations regarding areas of highest priority for translation of modern plant sciences to the field, as well as devising appropriate actions on key activities in crop improvement. The need to enhance education in the new areas of plant research and biotechnology was finally also addressed as was the key question of whether plant science and biotechnology hold the key providing suitable solutions for Africa. The participants agreed that while plant science and biotechnology may not completely "hold the key" these areas must be an important part of the solution, as is the need to develop feasible strategies for generic translational pipelines for introducing genes

and traits required for improvement of agricultural crops. This symposium was considered to be a great success by all who were involved. The meeting not only provided interesting and thought-provoking insights in new areas of plant science research but also viewed how such advances are being implemented for the benefit of African Agriculture, in order to improve food security.

*Christine H. Foyer, Africa College, Centre for Plant Sciences, University of Leeds, UK. October, 2009*



*Roger Plumb gives delegates a tour of the experimental plots at Rothamsted*

<http://www.utopia-audiovisual.co.uk/science.html>

## **Biopesticides: Commercial Uptake, The Olde Barn Hotel, Marston, 21 April 2010**

Biopesticides are pest management tools based on mass produced biologically-based agents. The term encompasses micro-organisms, plant extracts and semiochemicals, often sold in formulations that are quick to apply through conventional pesticide application equipment. Biopesticides can be valuable components of integrated pest management (IPM) programmes but should not be viewed as like-for-like alternatives to synthetic chemical toxins.

Their modes of action are quite different and their performance can be seriously affected by environmental conditions.

In 2006 and 2007, the University of Warwick organised two RELU sponsored conferences which explored the difficulty in bringing biopesticides to the market in the UK with emphasis on the regulatory process. Much progress has been made in the interim and several products based on biopesticides