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Cotton-growing know-how for poverty reduction in Africa

A learning exchange program that draws on Australia's cotton-growing history aims to provide poverty reduction opportunities for African families across the Sahel and sub-Saharan regions.



Credit: CSIRO

A delegation of researchers and farmers from Australia and Central and West Africa will deliver training to key African cotton farmers, industry representatives and researchers this week in Burkina Faso, West Africa.

Cash crops such as cotton provide important opportunities to reduce poverty and provide more food for African families across Africa's Sahel and sub-Saharan regions.

The largest cotton producing countries in West and Central Africa are Chad, Benin, Mali and Burkina Faso (often called the 'Cotton-4' countries), but these same countries also experience annual food crises. This is why Australian scientists and farmers, and global cotton industry leaders, are delivering specialised training to the C-4 countries as well as Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal and Togo.

'Crops like cotton provide smallholder farmers with cash to either purchase food or buy farm products that can be used to grow food crops such as maize and sorghum. Cash crops also offer important income sources for other needs such as school fees and medical expenses,' says Dr Peter Carberry, Deputy Director of CSIRO's Sustainable Agriculture Flagship.

The training in Burkina Faso will be the second step of a broader learning exchange process that saw a group from West Africa visit Australia earlier this year.

'From lessons learned during the Australian trip, we've built an impressive training program in collaboration with scientists from CSIRO and representatives from the Australian cotton industry,' says Dr Ousmane Ndoye, Program Manager (Senegal) for the West and Central African Council for Agricultural Research and Development (CORAF/WE CARD).

'The program will help African farmers understand how to develop higher yielding and better quality crops from their soils, discuss the implications of climate change on cotton production, and understand how to use less water and control pests using better pest

management best practices,' says Dr Ndoeye.

Twenty-five African researchers and industry participants will attend the workshop together with key policy makers to learn lessons from Australia's rich cotton history. Representatives will discuss new initiatives for the Cotton-4 countries which will lead to the introduction of incentives and practices to increase production and trade capacity.

The cotton training is supported by the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF), through its International Agricultural Cooperation program, and Conservation Farmers Inc (CFI).

Source: CSIRO

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