

The Food Convergence Innovation (FCI)

STAKEHOLDER CONVENTION IN NIGERIA

COMMUNIQUE

Communique from the Food Convergence Innovation (FCI) Stakeholder Convention

From the 11th of October to 13th October 2022, a community of fifty-five (55) professionals from public sector, private sector, development organisations, education and research organisations gathered at the Food Convergence Innovation Stakeholder Convention in Nigeria to discuss the sustainable management of aflatoxins in Nigeria. Participants included experts from crop production, food and feed processing, consumer awareness, human and veterinary medicine, regulatory organisations, private sectors stakeholders, research and development. The Convention jointly organised by International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Harvestplus, Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), and McGill Centre for the Convergence of Health and Economics (MCCHE) was held in Denis Hotel, Abuja.

The objectives of the convention were to:

- I. Pool and develop ideas towards the advancement of collaborative strategies for aflatoxin management in Nigeria.
- II. Develop strategies for management of aflatoxin (a food hazard) in national policies.
- III. Identify process flows and stakeholder contributions for aflatoxin management in the maize value chain, including vitamin A maize in this instance.
- IV. Suggest strategies for the development of a digital backbone to support the food convergence innovation.
- V. Suggest ways of creating an advocacy platform for sensitization on aflatoxins, health and economic impact, and management options.
- VI. Develop both the road map and backbone of a 10-year strategic document developed by the advocacy platform for addressing aflatoxin risks in food crops.

At the plenary sessions, plant and human pathologists presented data that reflected the high occurrence of aflatoxins in food crops grown in Nigeria and its risks to human health. A presentation on a 10-year study conducted revealed a high prevalence of aflatoxins in some crops. This is a high-risk factor for chronic aflatoxin exposure. Selected studies on hepatocellular carcinoma and experience from histopathologists showed that there were frequent presentations of liver cancer from post-mortem analysis including hepatocellular carcinoma (of which aflatoxins is a recognised dietary cause). Selected studies identified liver cancer as the third leading cause of cancer deaths among Nigerian males in Ife-Ijesha zone of Southwestern Nigeria. However, a deficiency in data regarding aflatoxin testing in humans was identified. In addition, reports from the rejected exported produce/products and loss of revenue as a result of aflatoxin contamination were also presented. This has resulted in significant economic loss and reputational risk in the international trade environment.

Following technical sessions on aflatoxin prevalence and its effects on human health and trade, available strategies for pre-harvest, harvest and post-harvest, and awareness approaches in aflatoxin management were discussed by stakeholders. This was held in panel sessions including representatives from FMARD, HIL, Seed Associations, Afex, CFARAP, NSPRI, Extension Africa, FCCPC, SON, NAFDAC, and NAQS. In the breakout sessions, challenges in scaling these technologies were discussed as well as actionable strategies for their adoption. To ensure sustainability, the approach for the Food Convergence Innovation was presented. This approach stimulates the convergence of partners driven by the support of a digital backbone. Prototypes and descriptions of how this can occur were presented. Data needs were identified for the development of a support digital platform that provide value to the different stakeholders.



From the convention, it was jointly agreed by all participants that a food convergence is critical for the sustainable management of aflatoxins nationally to curb the crisis caused by this natural toxin (aflatoxins). It was identified that MoUs are critical towards stimulating collaboration and convergence. Cooperation will be required with respect to data generation and sharing, partnership agreements and policy support.

Data is critical for decision-making and collaborative efforts for appropriate action to manage aflatoxin incidence in foods and risks of exposure. To this end, proposed strategies for immediate action were identified as follows:

- I. A need for memoranda of understanding to be signed among stakeholders to guide the plans towards commitment to a food convergence innovation
- II. The need for the development of the co-creation of awareness materials for unified messaging on the risks and solutions for aflatoxin management with a stronger involvement by health professionals.

Other priority areas identified include:

- I. Need for data curation and generation for relevant indices for incorporation into a digital platform for use by national stakeholders. This can help with mapping of risks, identification of appropriate interventions per region (Stakeholders data on prevalence in crops, exposure in humans and animals, awareness outreach)
- II. Urgent need for data generation on exposure levels from human tissues towards appropriate actions and tracking of intervention in aflatoxin management
- III. Accreditation of testing centres for rapid screening of aflatoxin contamination in crop samples that are fit-for-purpose by the relevant accreditation bodies (e.g. NiNAS, IPAN, SON)

To this end, multistakeholder convergence is critical for national development.

List of Abbreviations

CFARAP – Co-competition Forum for Aflatoxin Reduced Agricultural Produce, **FCCPC** - Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Commission, **FAO** - Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, **FCI** – Food Convergence Innovation, **FMARD** – Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, **GAIN** - Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition, **HIL** – Harvestfield Industries Limited, **IPAN** – Institute of Public Analysts of Nigeria, **IITA** – International Institute of Tropical Agriculture, **MCHE** - McGill Centre for the Convergence of Health and Economics, **MoU** – Memorandum of Understanding, **NAFDAC** – National Agency for Food and Drug Administration, **NAQS** – Nigeria Agricultural Quarantine Service, **NiNAS** - Nigeria National Accreditation System, **NSPRI** - Nigerian Stored Products Research Institute, **SON** – Standards Organisation of Nigeria.

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