Events

IPI Events

September 2014

1st IPI-Ministry of Agriculture-Ethiopian ATA joint Symposium on "The Role of Potassium in Cropping Systems of sub-Saharan Africa: Current Status and Potential for Increasing Productivity", Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 4-5 September 2014

Report by Hillel Magen, IPI Director

The 1st Potash Symposium jointly organized by the International Potash Institute (IPI), Ministry of Agriculture, Ethiopia (MOA) and the Ethiopian Agriculture Transformation Agency (ATA) was held in Addis Ababa during 4-5 September, 2014. More than 25 papers were presented during the first two days with more than 80 scientists, extension officers, officials and private farmers attending the event. A field trip to visit demonstration plots near the city of Debre Birhan was also held on the 6th September.

The symposium ceremony began with Prof. Tekalign Mamo, Minister's Advisor and State Minister's welcome address; Mr. Tesfay Mengiste, Director General of Extension at the Ministry gave the official opening speech on behalf of H.E. Ato Tefera Derbew, Minister of Agriculture, Ethiopia. This was followed by a key note speech by Mr. Khalid Bomba, CEO Ethiopian Agricultural Transformation Agency (ATA). Mr. Serkalem Adigeh, Embassy of Israel, addressed the audience with greetings on behalf of the Ambassador, Ms. Belaynesh Zevadia, and Mr. Hillel Magen, Director IPI delivered a speech on the role of fertilizers in improving food security.

The five sessions of the symposium included papers describing the development and challenges of agriculture in East Africa and, in particular, the fertilizer sector in Ethiopia. The Ethiopian soil mapping project, potassium (K) in soil and plant systems, experiments with

Photo 1 (top). Group photo of participants at the 1st IPI-Ministry of Agriculture-Ethiopian ATA joint Symposium, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 4-5 September 2014.

Photo 2 (bottom). Panel session chaired by Prof. Tekalign Mamo, MOA, Ethiopia (second from left) and other panel members, Dr. Uri Yermiyahu, ARO, Israel (left), Dr. Jeoren Huising, IITA, Nigeria (middle), Mr. Hillel Magen, IPI, Switzerland (second from right) and Dr. Kibebew Kibret, Haramaya University, Ethiopia (right). Photos by E. Sokolowski.

potash fertilization in the country and other countries of East Africa were also presented along with various aspects of soil analysis and fertilizer recommendations for the continent.

Major issues emerged from the papers and the active discussions that took place:

- During recent years, Ethiopia has significantly increased its food production. However, with additional improved practices, productivity could be substantially raised further.
- While there is existing policy for micro-credit to farmers in place, additional credit to farmers may play a significant role in improving crop productivity in Ethiopia.
- There is an efficient supply chain for fertilizers in Ethiopia.
- The livestock sector will play a much more important role in future agricultural productivity.
- Identifying appropriate cropping systems (e.g. inclusion of legumes), increased cropping intensity and improved nutrient management practices would improve productivity in many East African countries.
- More dedicated research on the nutrient demand and fertilization practices are needed for Ethiopia's unique crops (e.g. teff, coffee, enset).
- Ethiopian Soil Information System (EthioSIS) provides detailed soil fertility mapping which allows follow-up by agronomists and fertilizer suppliers to meet the site specific nutrient requirements in many parts of the country. However, cropping systems are not part of this work and their inclusion will add much value to consolidating fertilizer recommendations.
- Hundreds of demo plots, mostly in Tigray, Amhara, Oromia and SNNPS states complement the data obtained from EthioSIS soil mapping.
- Exchangeable K analysis carried out extensively by EthioSIS would benefit from additional K-intensity analysis.
- Multi-nutrients deficiency - not just N, P and K - occur in many East African countries, which highlights the need for dedicated 'balanced fertilization' programs.
- Managed balanced fertilization practices may bring very high agronomic efficiencies to K application (>20 kg/kg).
- Spectral soil analysis provides a tool to improve fertilizer recommendations; more work is needed to establish recommended levels of K in plants.
- Capacity building along the fertilizer value chain is urgently needed.

In his concluding remarks, Prof. Tekalign Mamo called for a further event in 2015 to enable follow up and provide guidelines for additional research and dissemination activities.

This report also appears on the IPI website at:

Regional activities/sub-Saharan Africa